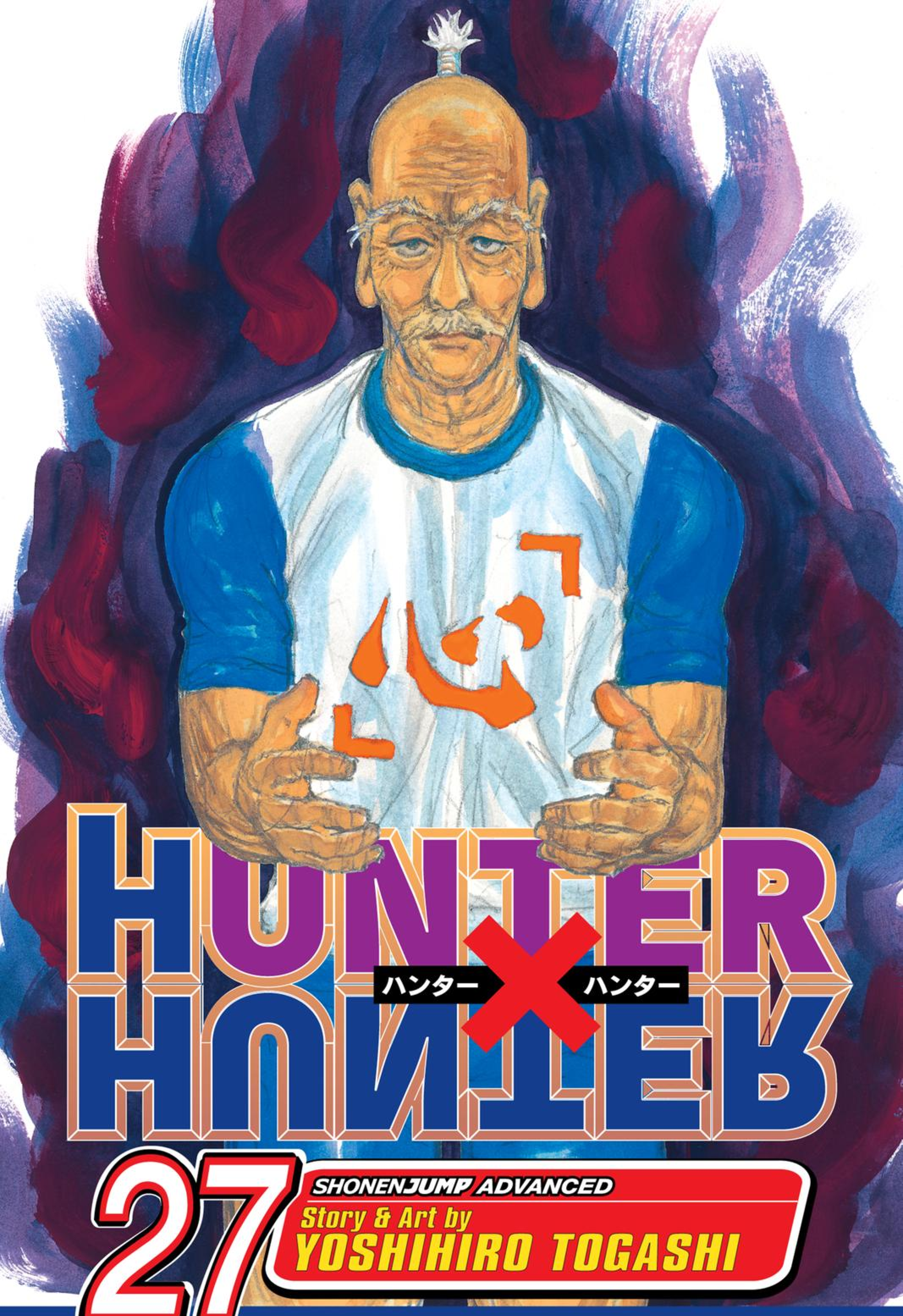

HUNTER × HUNTER

ハンター × ハンター

27

SHONENJUMP ADVANCED

Story & Art by

YOSHIHIRO TOGASHI

冨樫義博

We had a second child. Oh yes. The kid's one year old already. Oh yes.

Yoshihiro Togashi

Yoshihiro Togashi's manga career began in 1986 at the age of 20, when he won the coveted Osamu Tezuka Award for new manga artists. He debuted in the Japanese **Weekly Shonen Jump** magazine in 1989 with the romantic comedy **Tende Shôwaru Cupid**. From 1990 to 1994 he wrote and drew the hit manga **YuYu Hakusho**, which was followed by the dark comedy science-fiction series **Level E**, and finally this adventure series, **Hunter x Hunter**, available from VIZ Media's SHONEN JUMP Advanced imprint. In 1999 he married the manga artist Naoko Takeuchi.

HUNTER X HUNTER Volume 27
SHONEN JUMP ADVANCED Manga Edition

STORY AND ART BY
YOSHIHIRO TOGASHI

English Adaptation & Translation/Lillian Olsen
Touch-up Art & Lettering/Mark McMurray
Design/Matt Hinrichs
Editor/Shaenon K. Garrity

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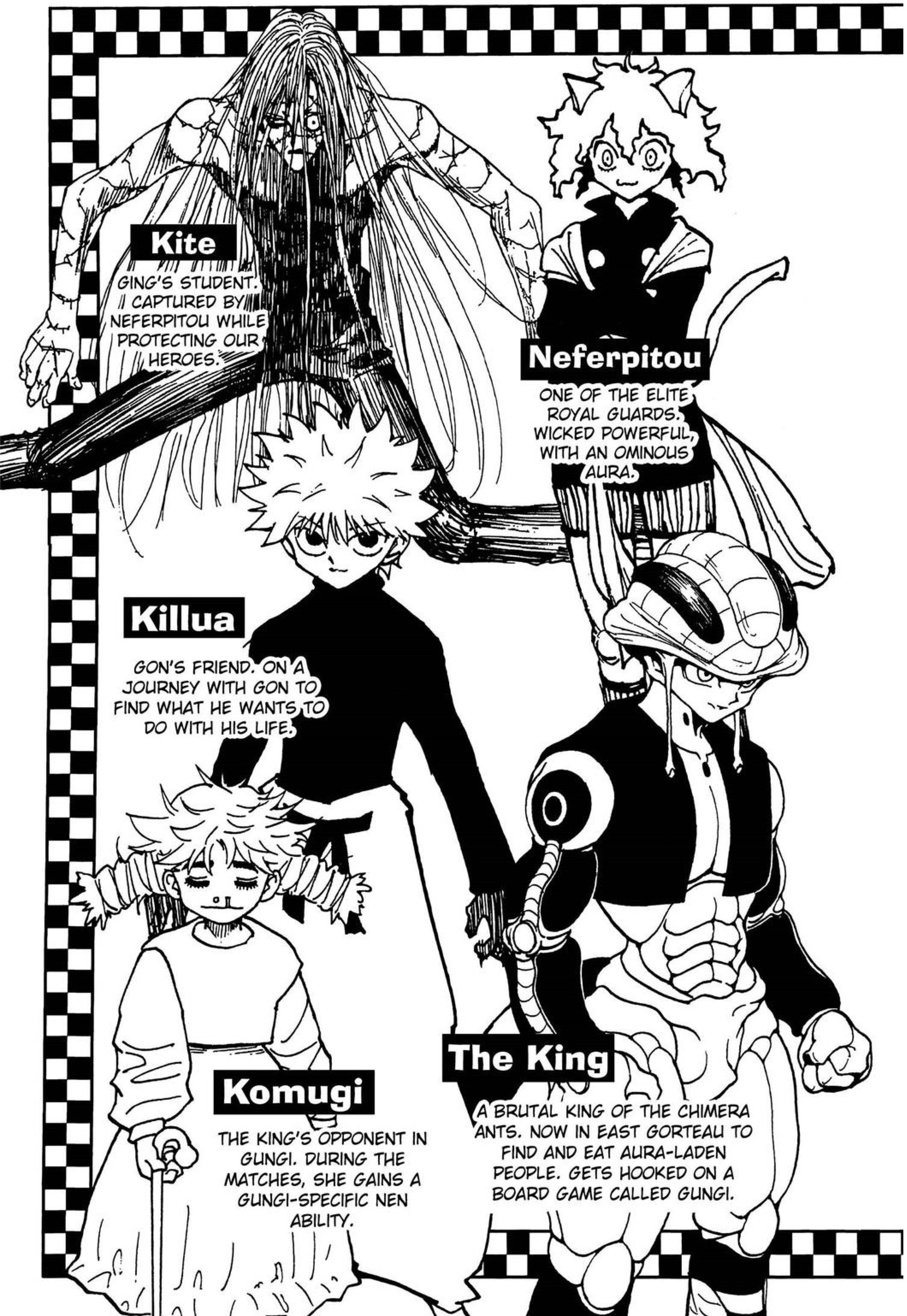
It's the heart
that's important.

HUNTER × HUNTER

ハンター × ハンター

Story & Art by
Yoshihiro Togashi

Volume 27



Kite

GING'S STUDENT. CAPTURED BY NEFERPITOU WHILE PROTECTING OUR HEROES.

Neferpitou

ONE OF THE ELITE ROYAL GUARDS. WICKED POWERFUL, WITH AN OMINOUS AURA.

Killua

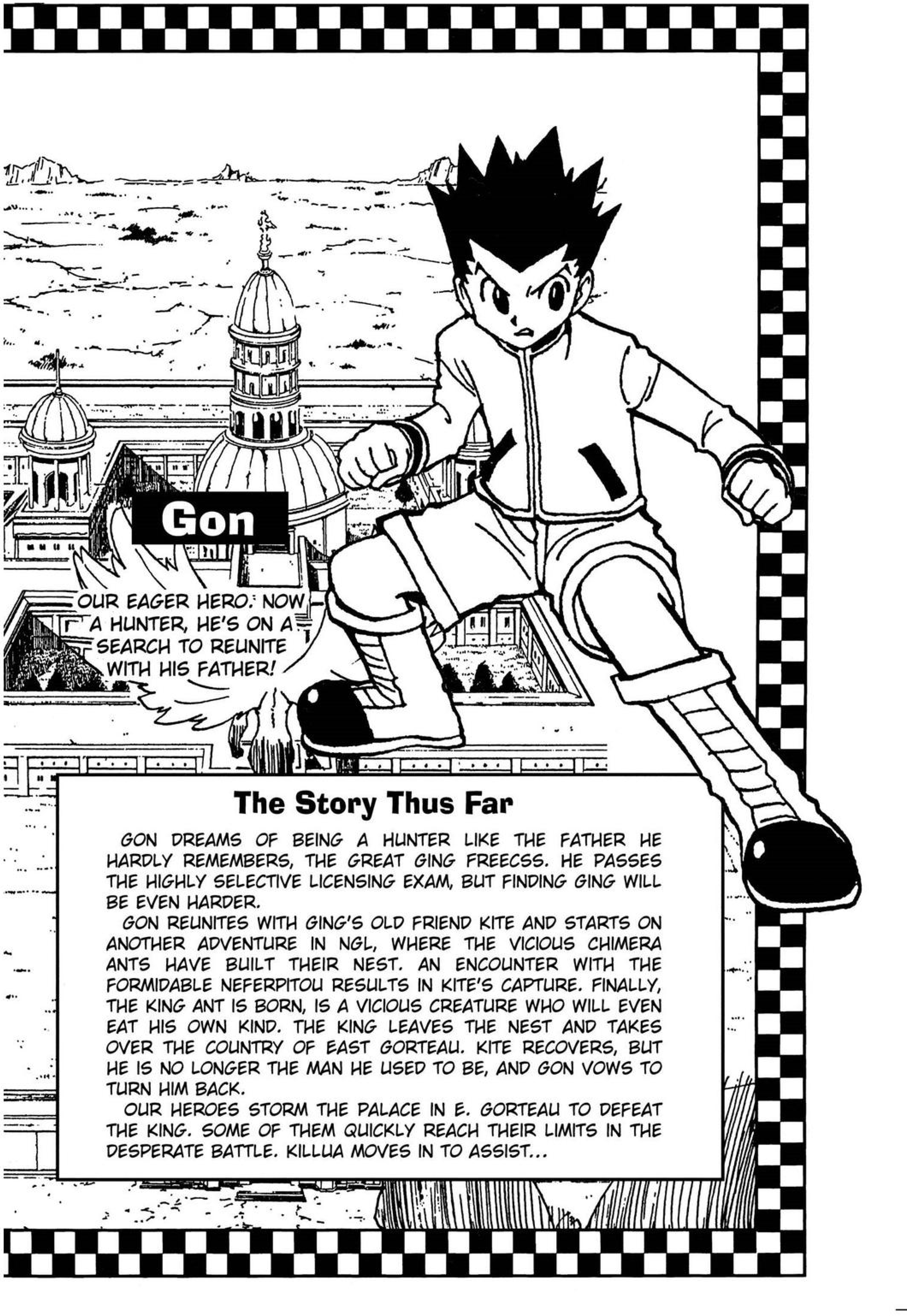
GON'S FRIEND. ON A JOURNEY WITH GON TO FIND WHAT HE WANTS TO DO WITH HIS LIFE.

Komugi

THE KING'S OPPONENT IN GUNGI. DURING THE MATCHES, SHE GAINS A GUNGI-SPECIFIC NEN ABILITY.

The King

A BRUTAL KING OF THE CHIMERA ANTS. NOW IN EAST GORTEAU TO FIND AND EAT AURA-LADEN PEOPLE. GETS HOOKED ON A BOARD GAME CALLED GUNGI.



Gon

OUR EAGER HERO. NOW A HUNTER, HE'S ON A SEARCH TO REUNITE WITH HIS FATHER!

The Story Thus Far

GON DREAMS OF BEING A HUNTER LIKE THE FATHER HE HARDLY REMEMBERS, THE GREAT GING FREECSS. HE PASSES THE HIGHLY SELECTIVE LICENSING EXAM, BUT FINDING GING WILL BE EVEN HARDER.

GON REUNITES WITH GING'S OLD FRIEND KITE AND STARTS ON ANOTHER ADVENTURE IN NGL, WHERE THE VICIOUS CHIMERA ANTS HAVE BUILT THEIR NEST. AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE FORMIDABLE NEFERPITOU RESULTS IN KITE'S CAPTURE. FINALLY, THE KING ANT IS BORN, IS A VICIOUS CREATURE WHO WILL EVEN EAT HIS OWN KIND. THE KING LEAVES THE NEST AND TAKES OVER THE COUNTRY OF EAST GORTEAU. KITE RECOVERS, BUT HE IS NO LONGER THE MAN HE USED TO BE, AND GON VOWS TO TURN HIM BACK.

OUR HEROES STORM THE PALACE IN E. GORTEAU TO DEFEAT THE KING. SOME OF THEM QUICKLY REACH THEIR LIMITS IN THE DESPERATE BATTLE. KILLUA MOVES IN TO ASSIST...

HUNTER×HUNTER

Volume 27

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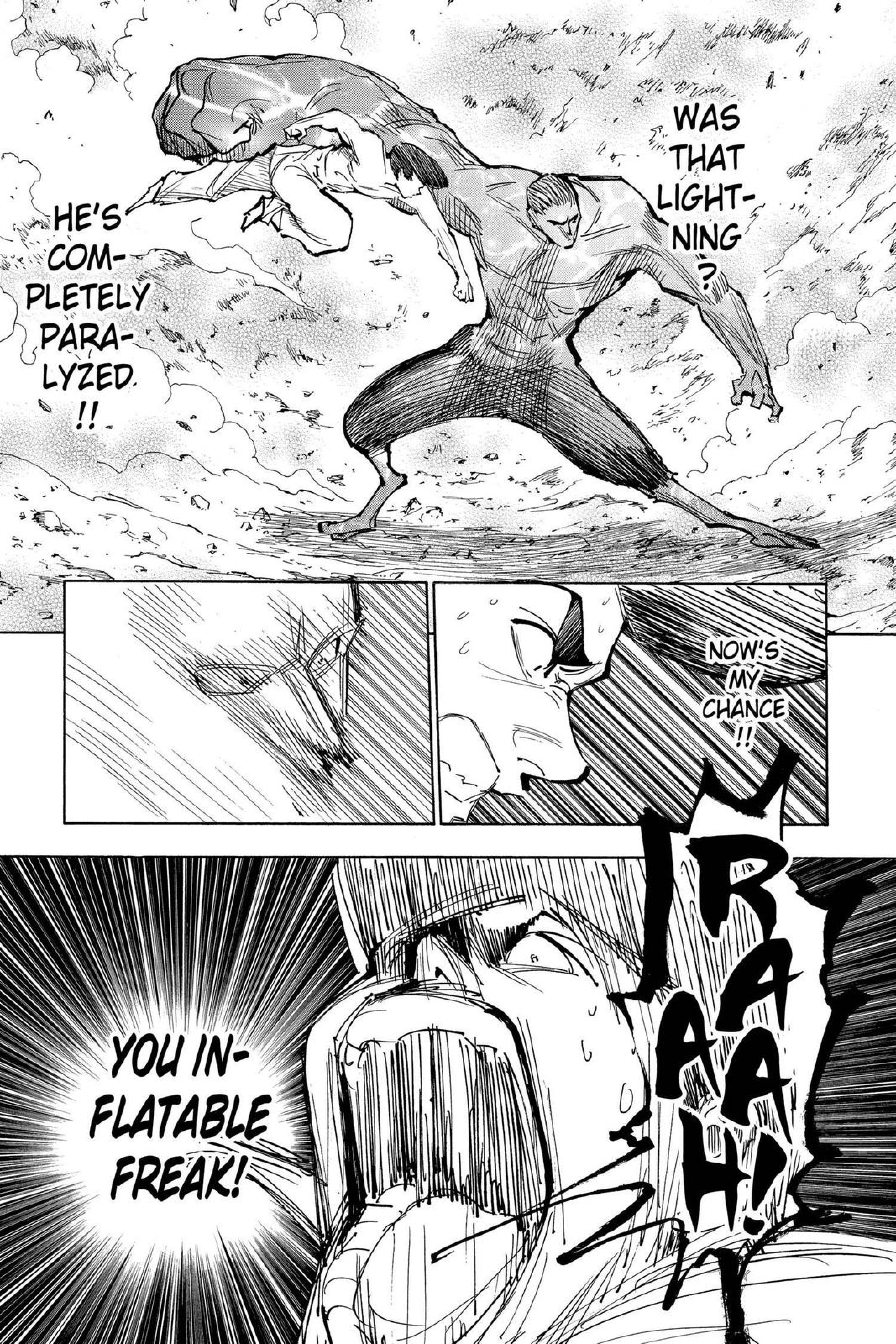
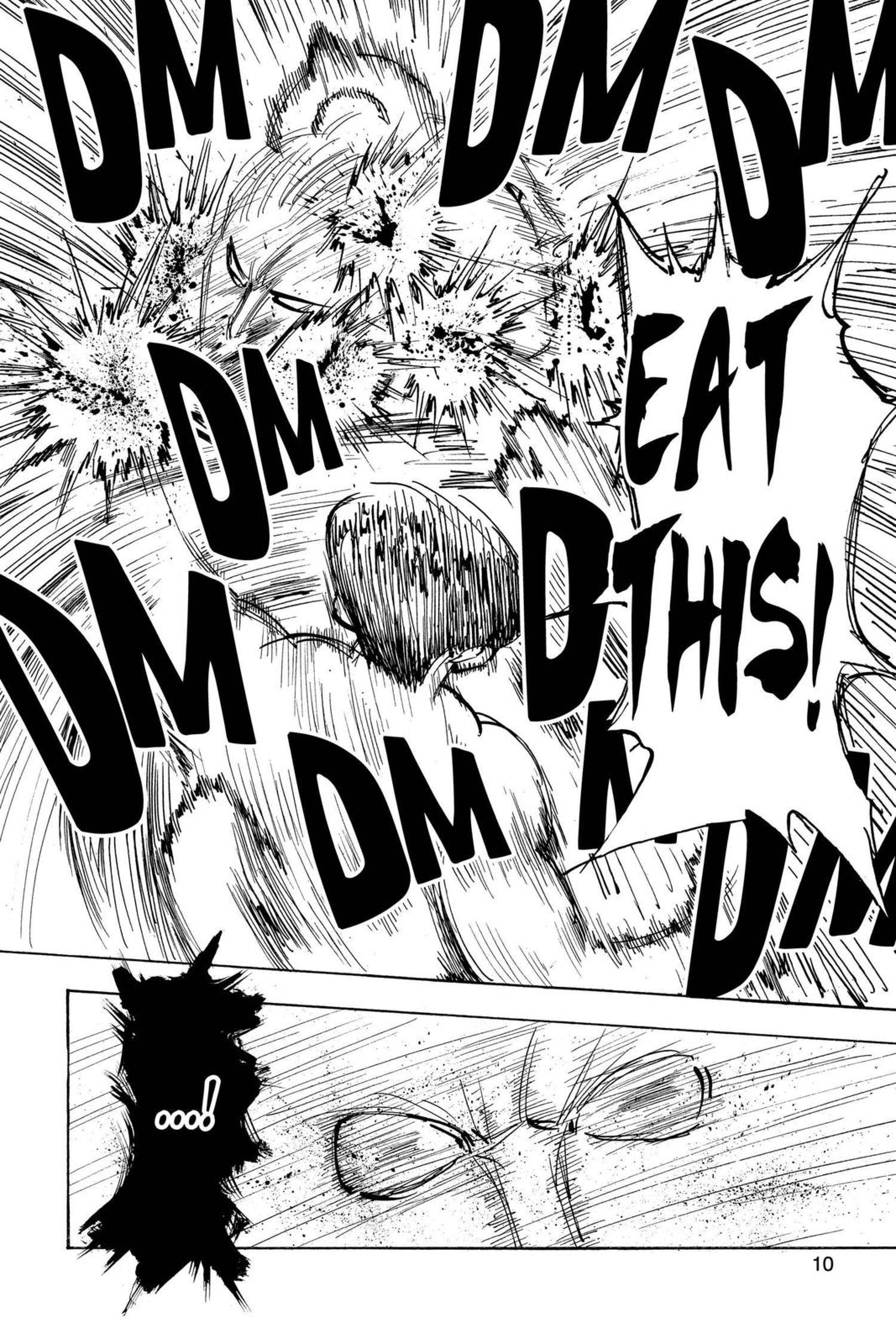
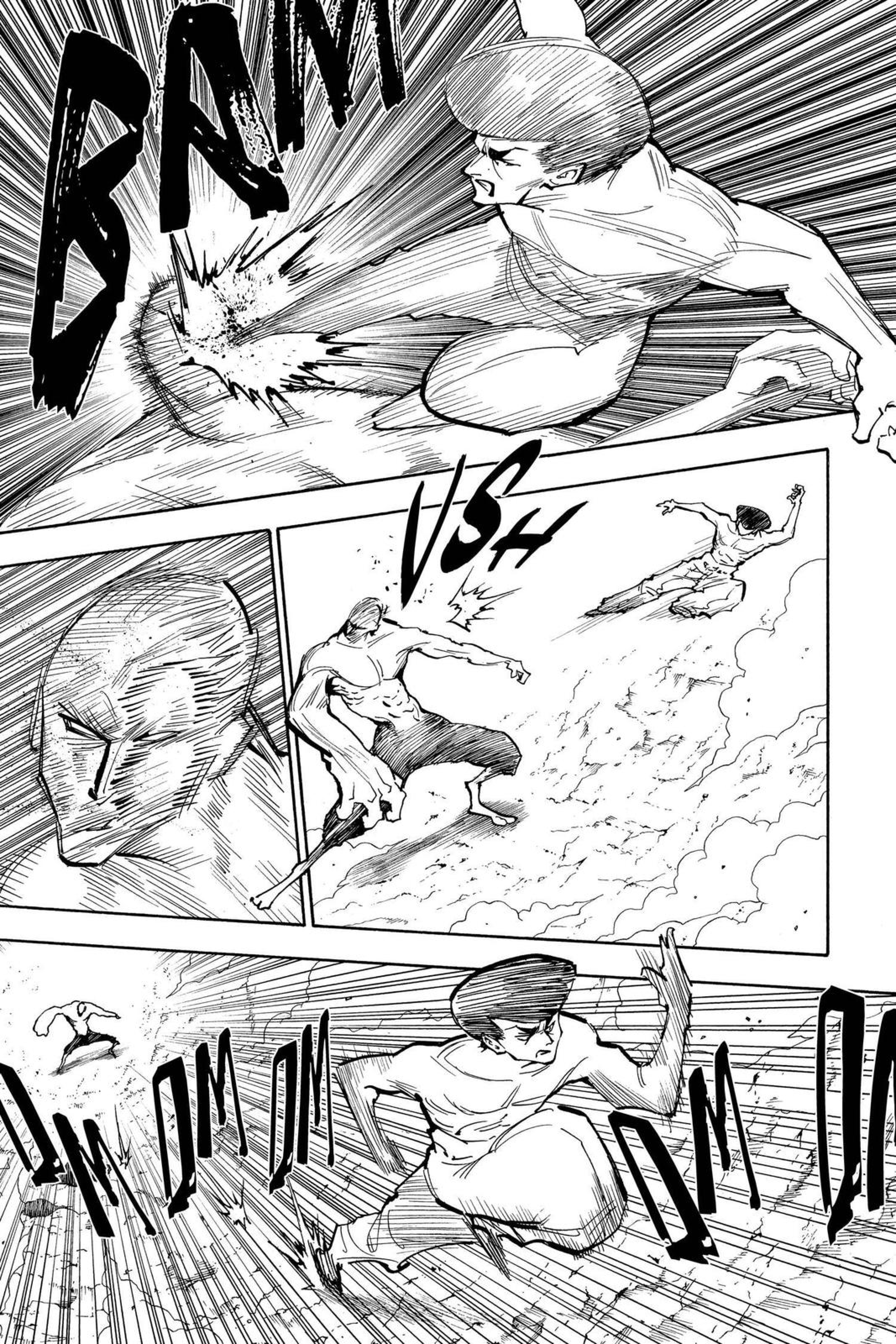
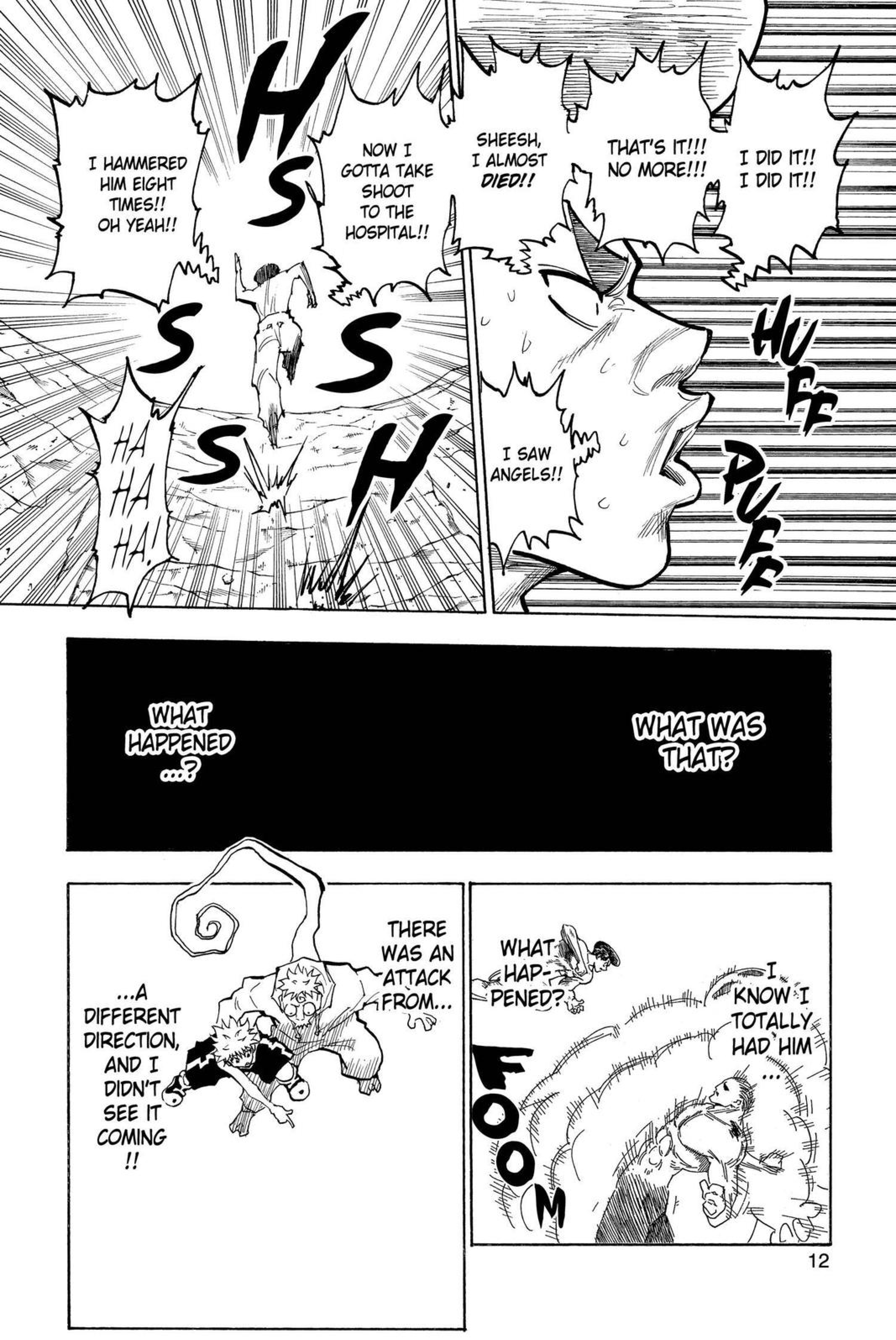
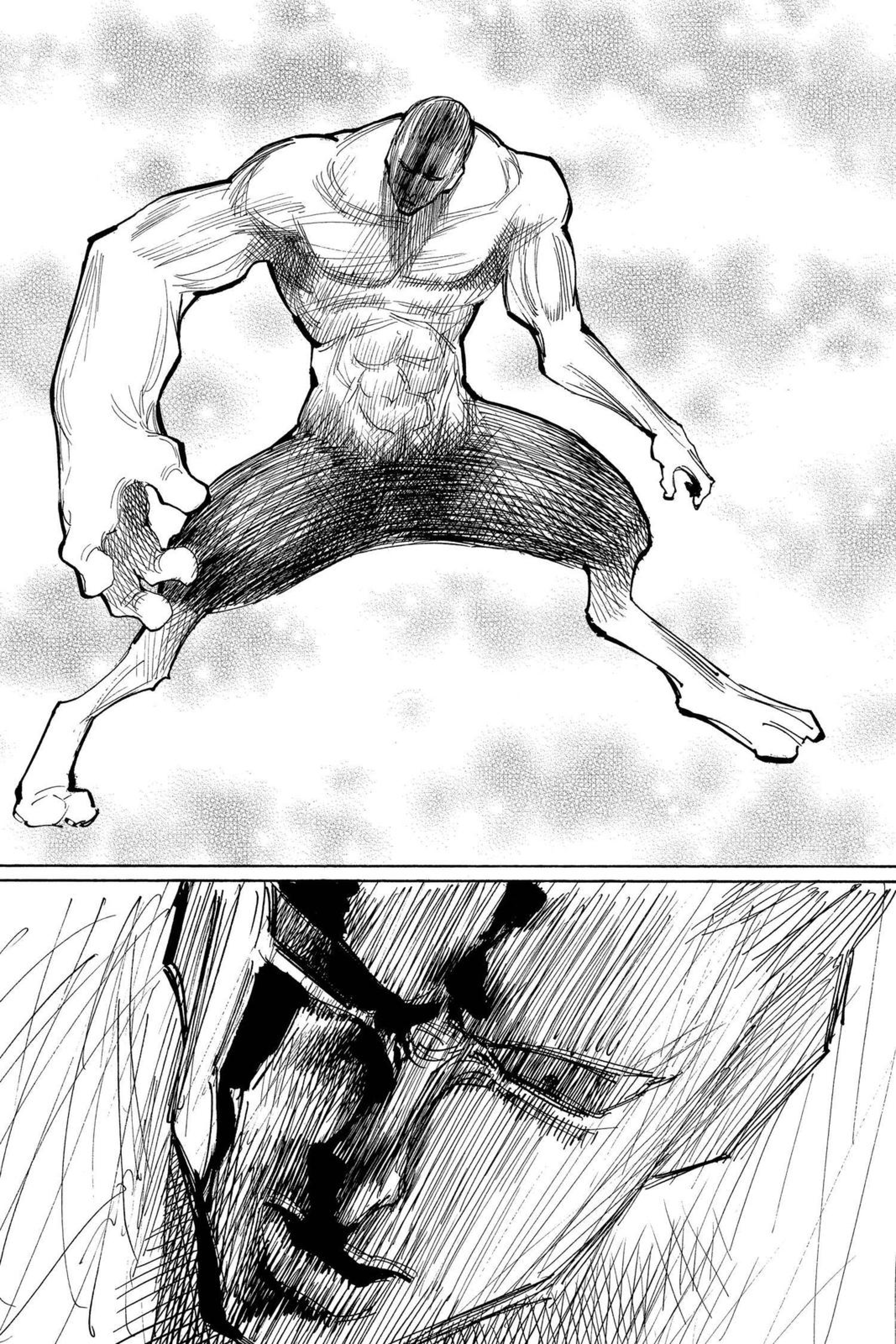
Chapter 281: Godspeed

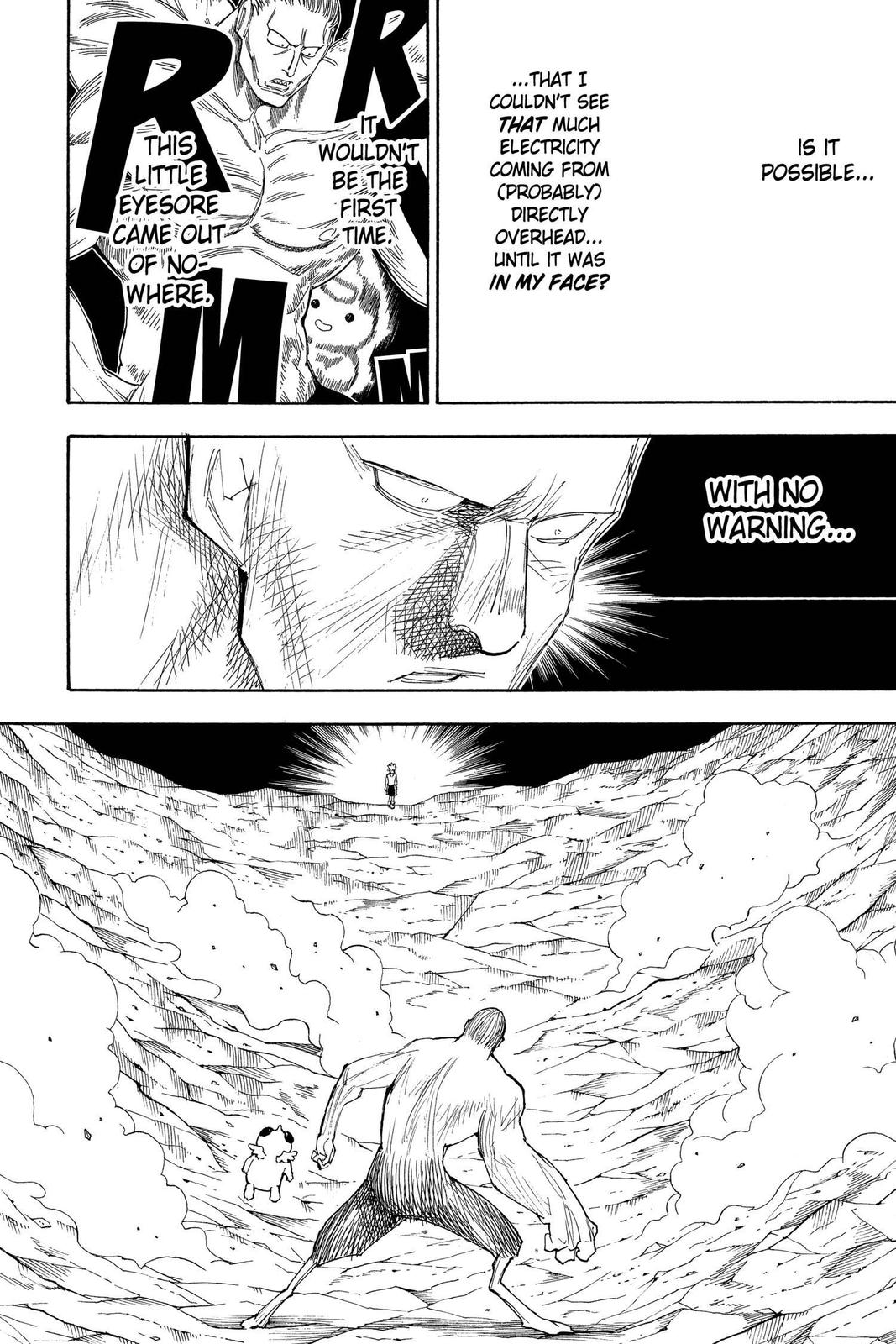

WAS THAT LIGHTNING?
HE'S COMPLETELY PARALYZED!!
NOW'S MY CHANCE!!
RAAAH!!
YOU INFLATABLE FREAK!

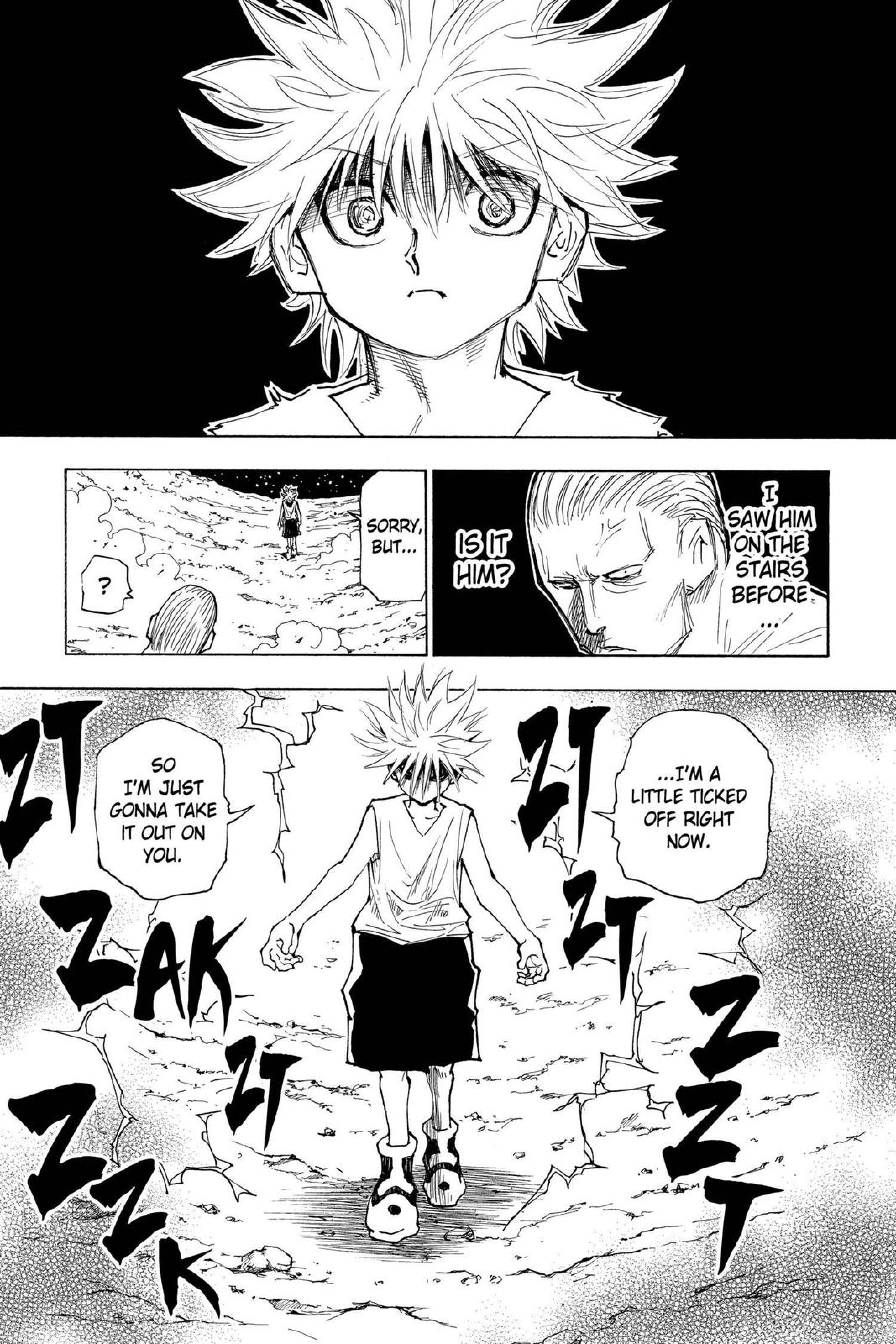

DM
DM
DM
EAT THIS!
DM
DM
DM
DM
DM
ooo!

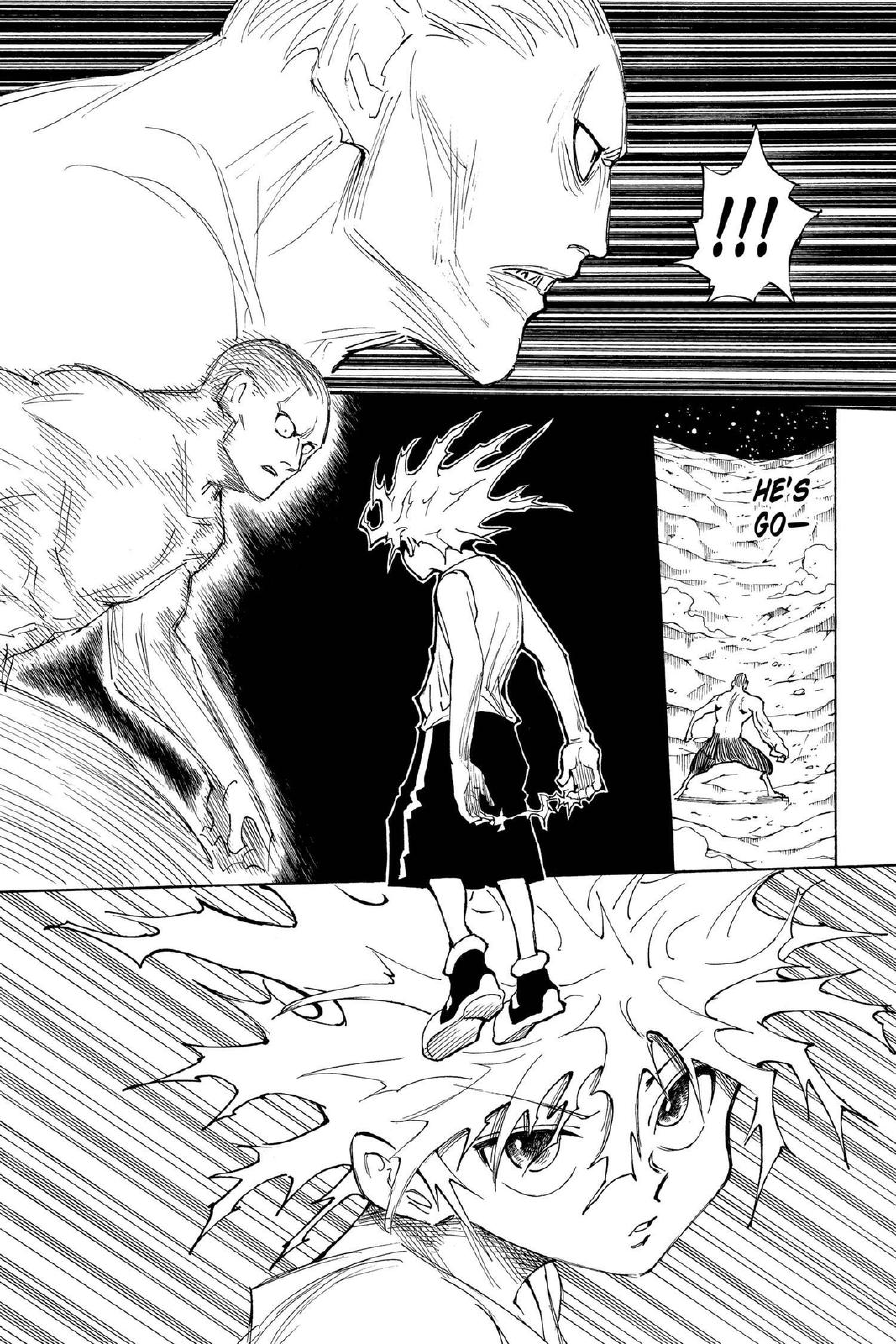

BAM
VSH
DM DM DM
DM DM DM

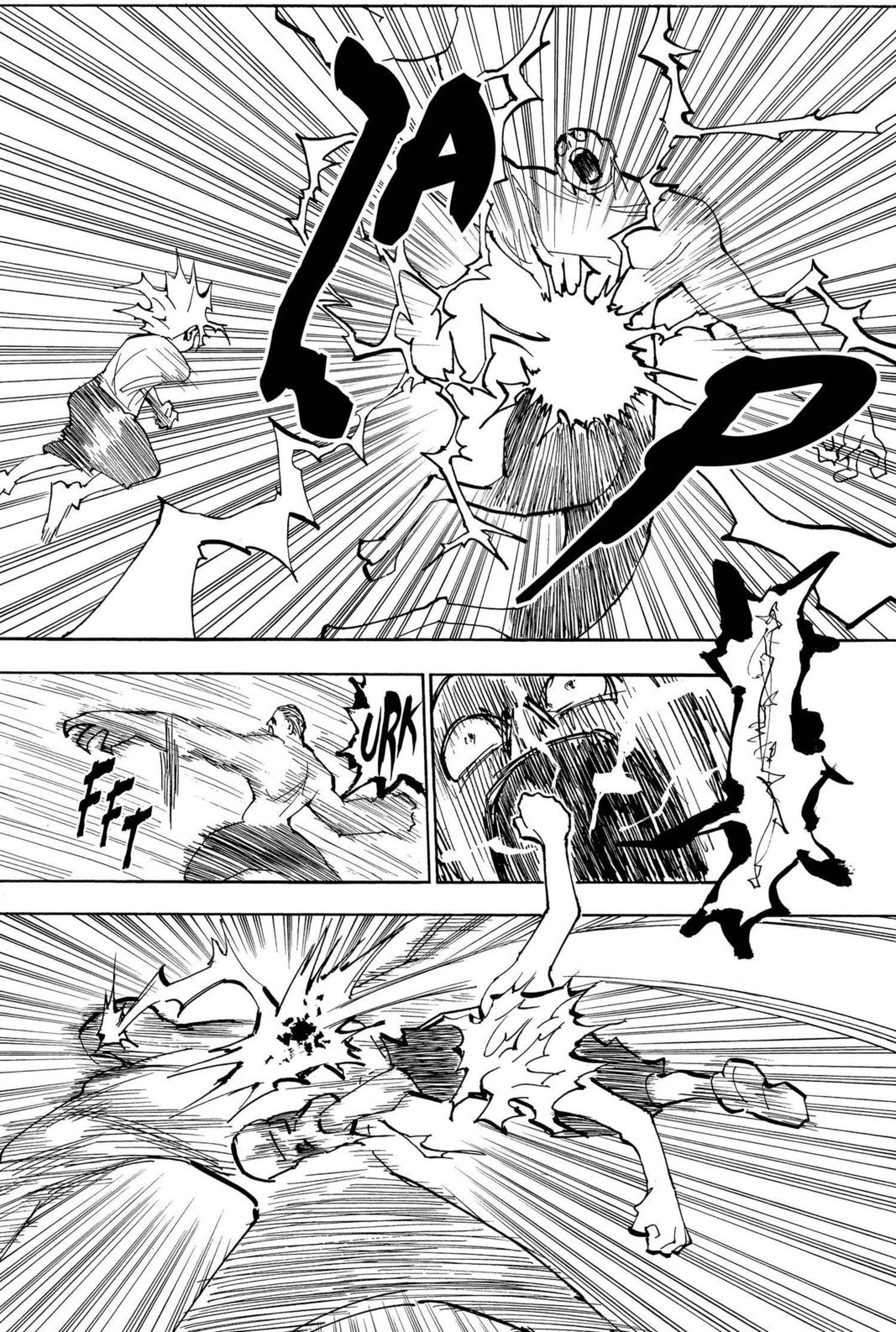

HUFF PUFF
I DID IT!! I DID IT!!
THAT'S IT!!! NO MORE!!!
SHEESH, I ALMOST *DIED!!*
I SAW ANGELS!!
NOW I GOTTA TAKE SHOOT TO THE HOSPITAL!!
I HAMMERED HIM EIGHT TIMES!! OH YEAH!!
HSSSSH
HA HA HA!
WHAT WAS THAT?
WHAT HAPPENED ...?
I KNOW I TOTALLY HAD HIM ...
WHAT HAP-PENED?
FOOM
THERE WAS AN ATTACK FROM...
...A DIFFERENT DIRECTION, AND I DIDN'T SEE IT COMING !!

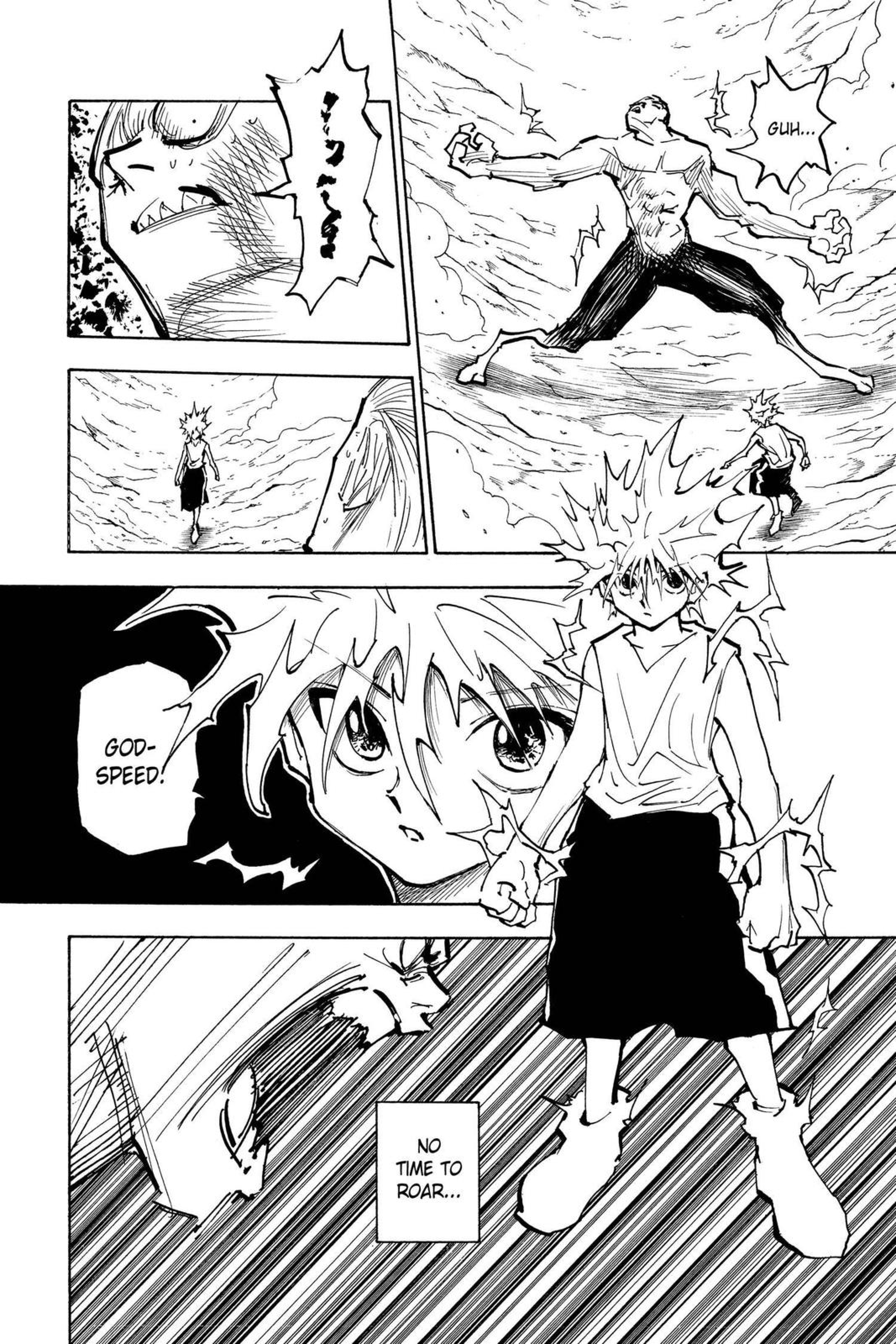


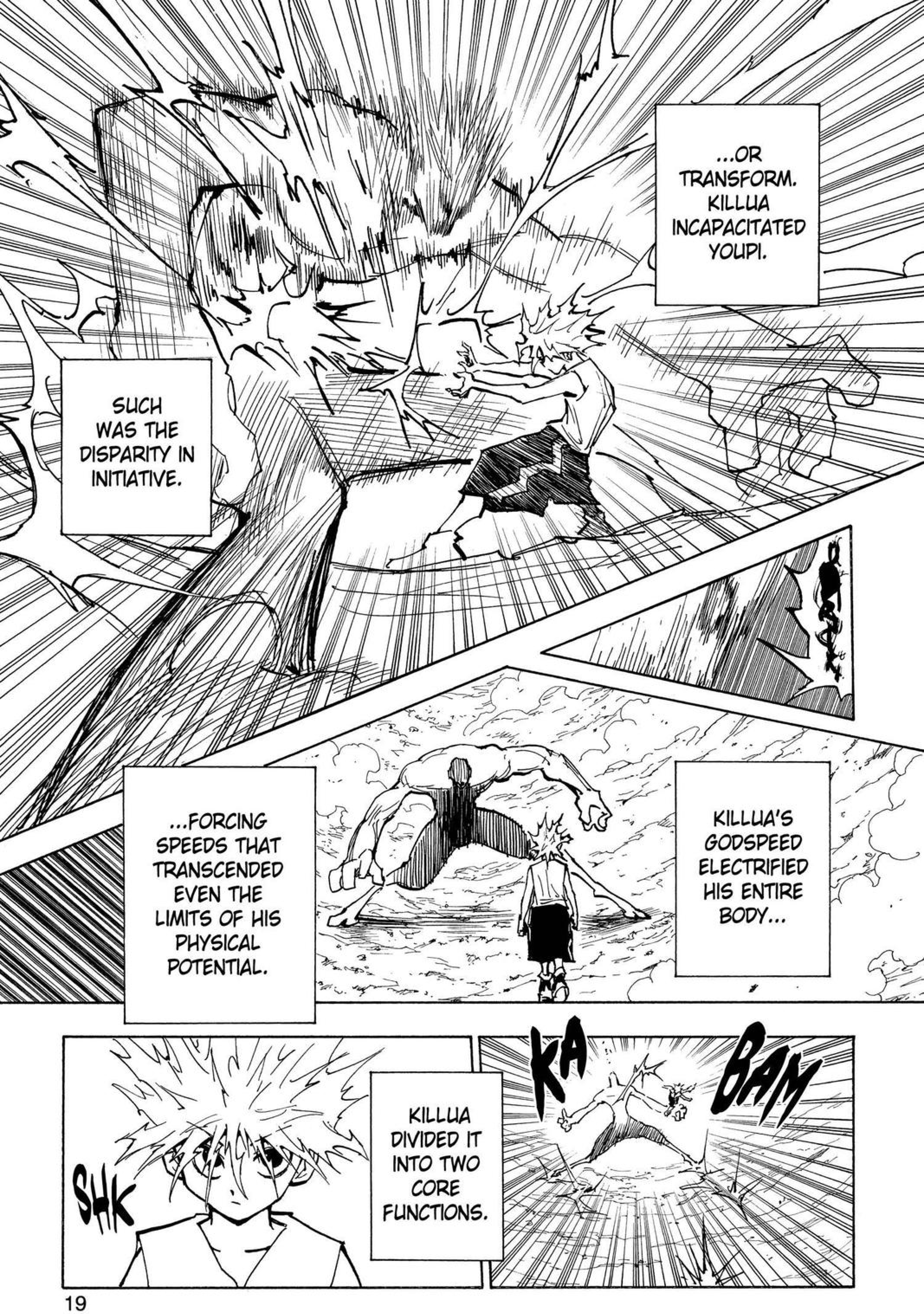

IS IT POSSIBLE...
...THAT I COULDN'T SEE *THAT* MUCH ELECTRICITY COMING FROM (PROBABLY) DIRECTLY OVERHEAD... UNTIL IT WAS *IN MY FACE?*
RRMM
IT WOULDN'T BE THE FIRST TIME.
THIS LITTLE EYESORE CAME OUT OF NOWHERE.
WITH NO WARNING...

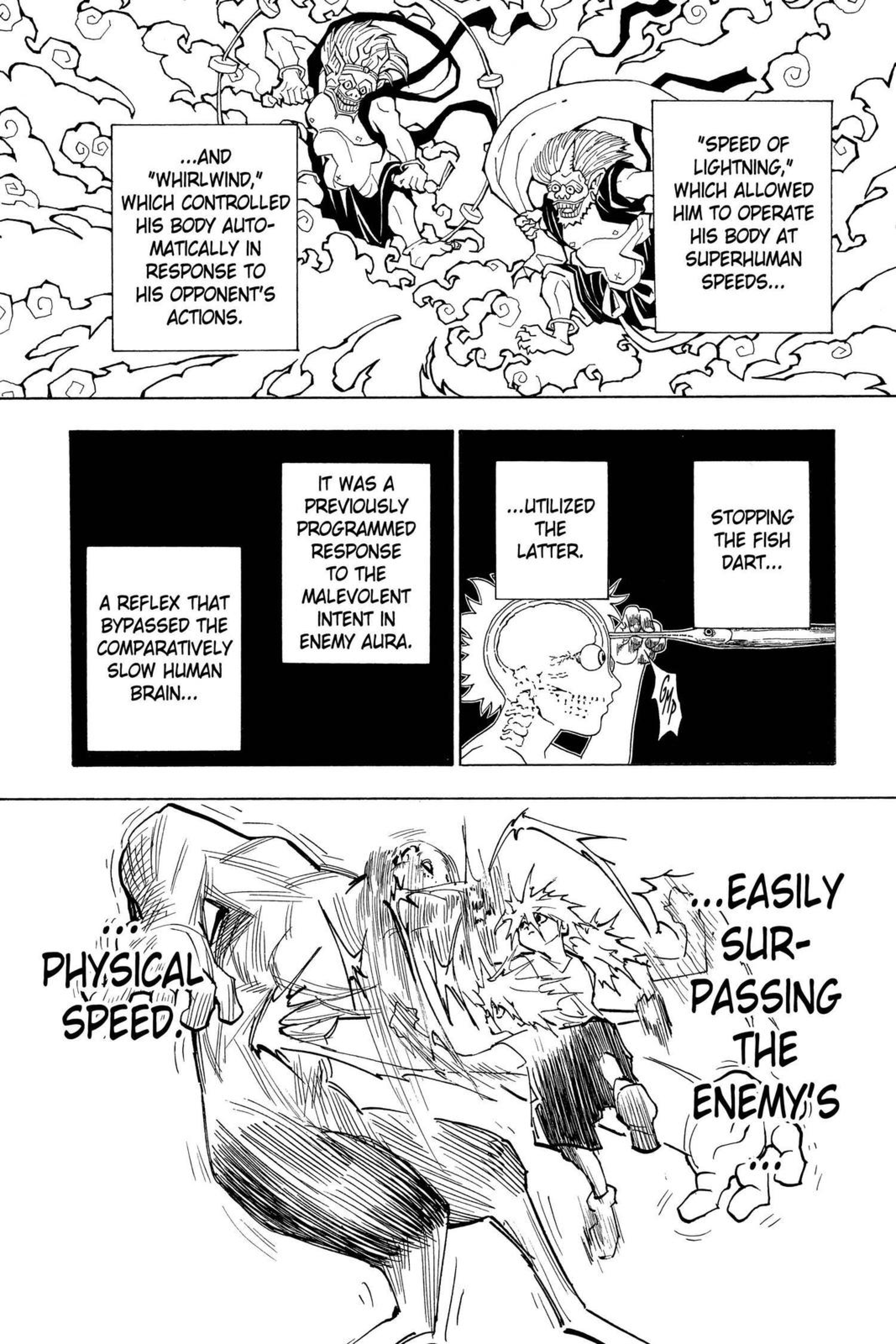

I SAW HIM ON THE STAIRS BEFORE...
IS IT HIM?
SORRY, BUT...
?
...I'M A LITTLE TICKED OFF RIGHT NOW.
SO I'M JUST GONNA TAKE IT OUT ON YOU.
ZT
ZT
ZZZT
ZT
ZAK
ZT
ZZZK

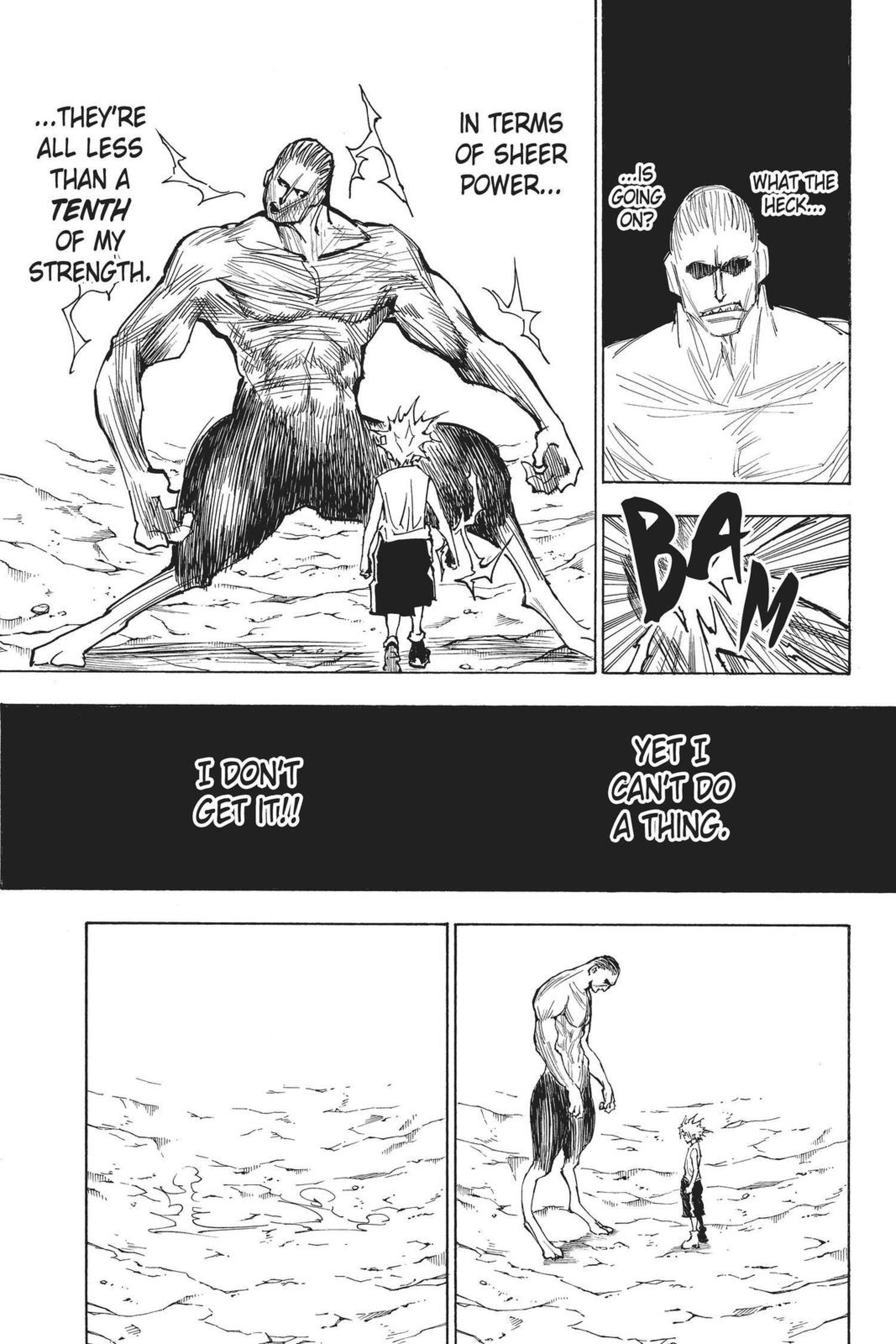

!!!
HE'S GO—

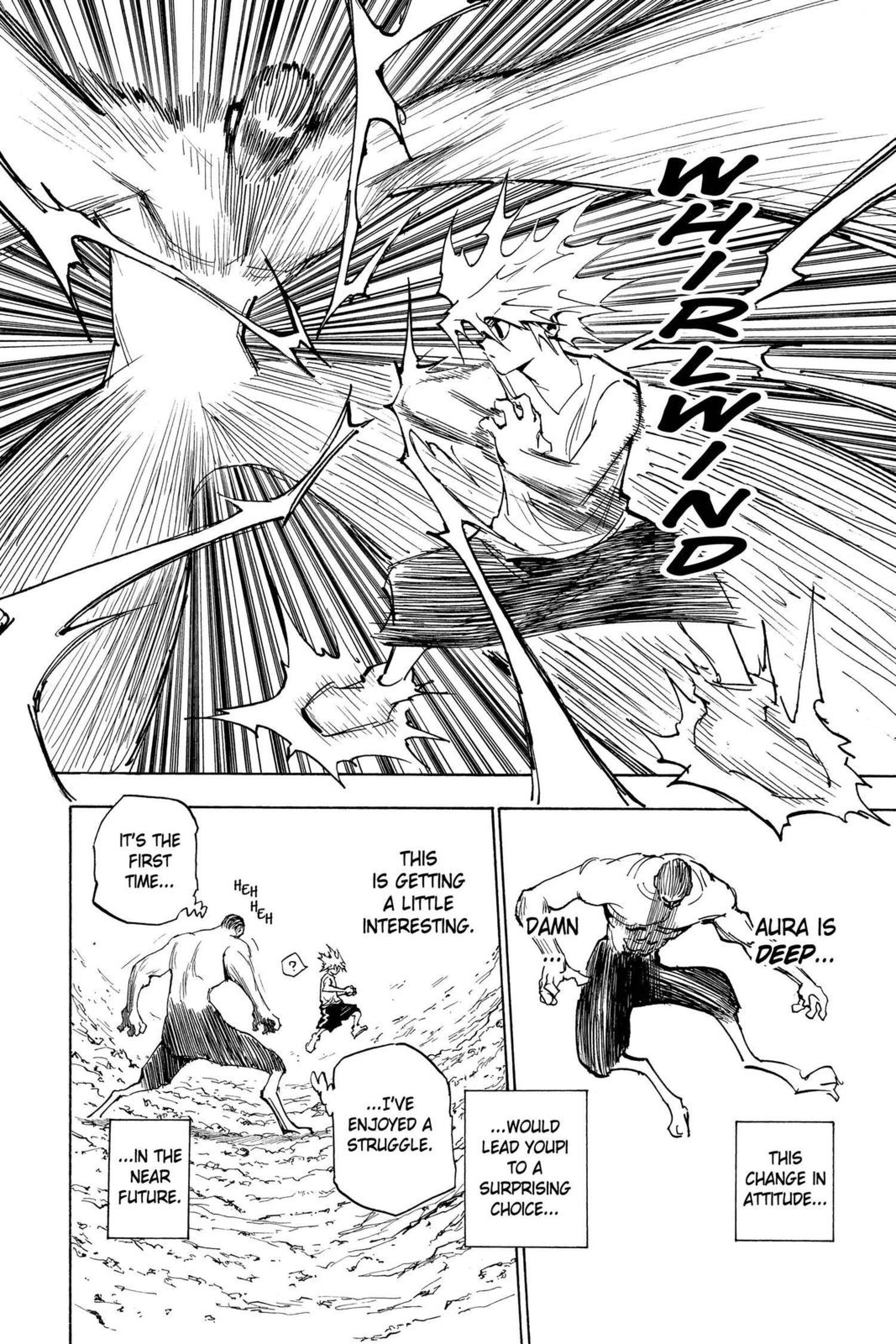

TAP
URK
FFT

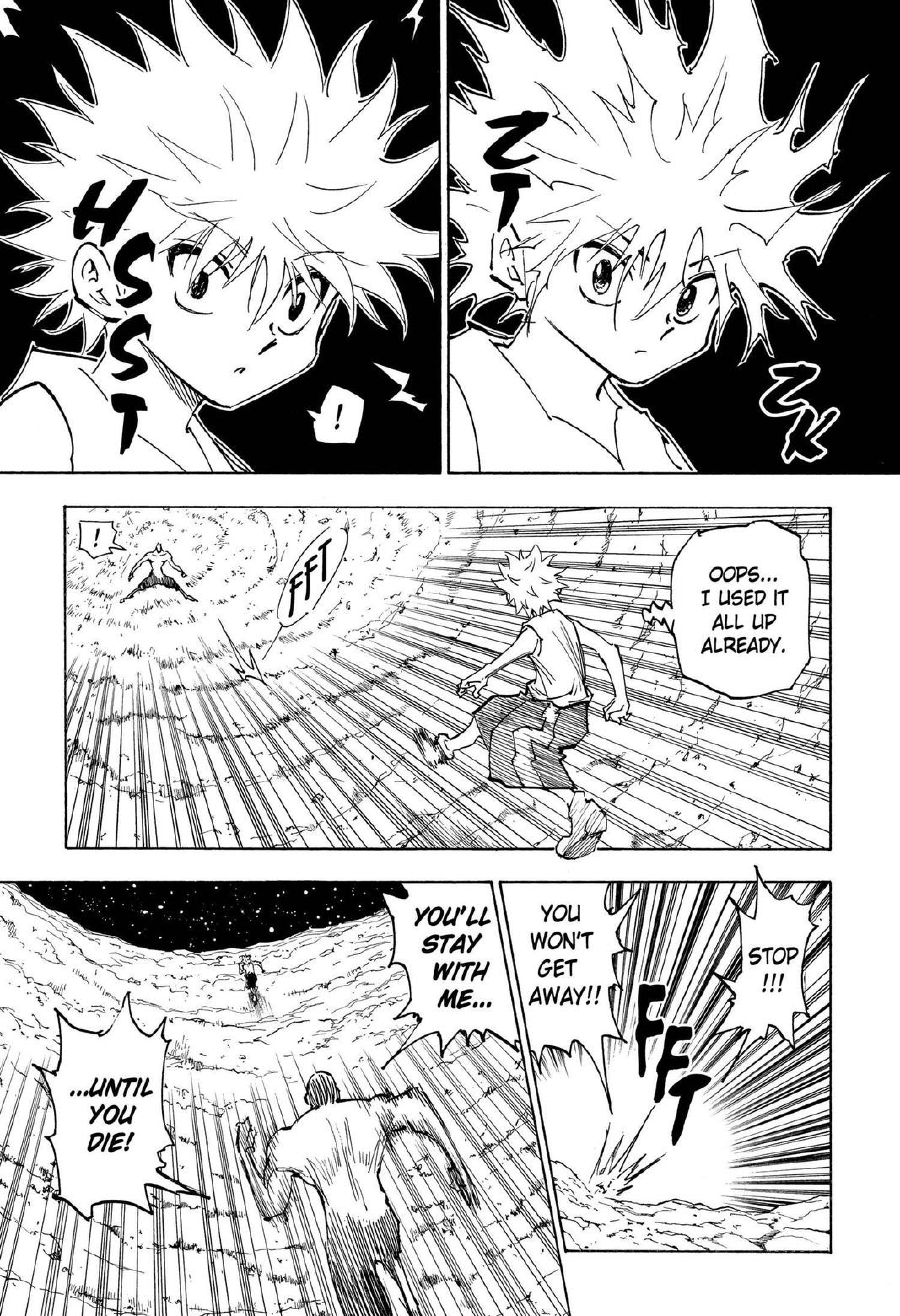

GUH...
GOD-SPEED!
NO TIME TO ROAR...

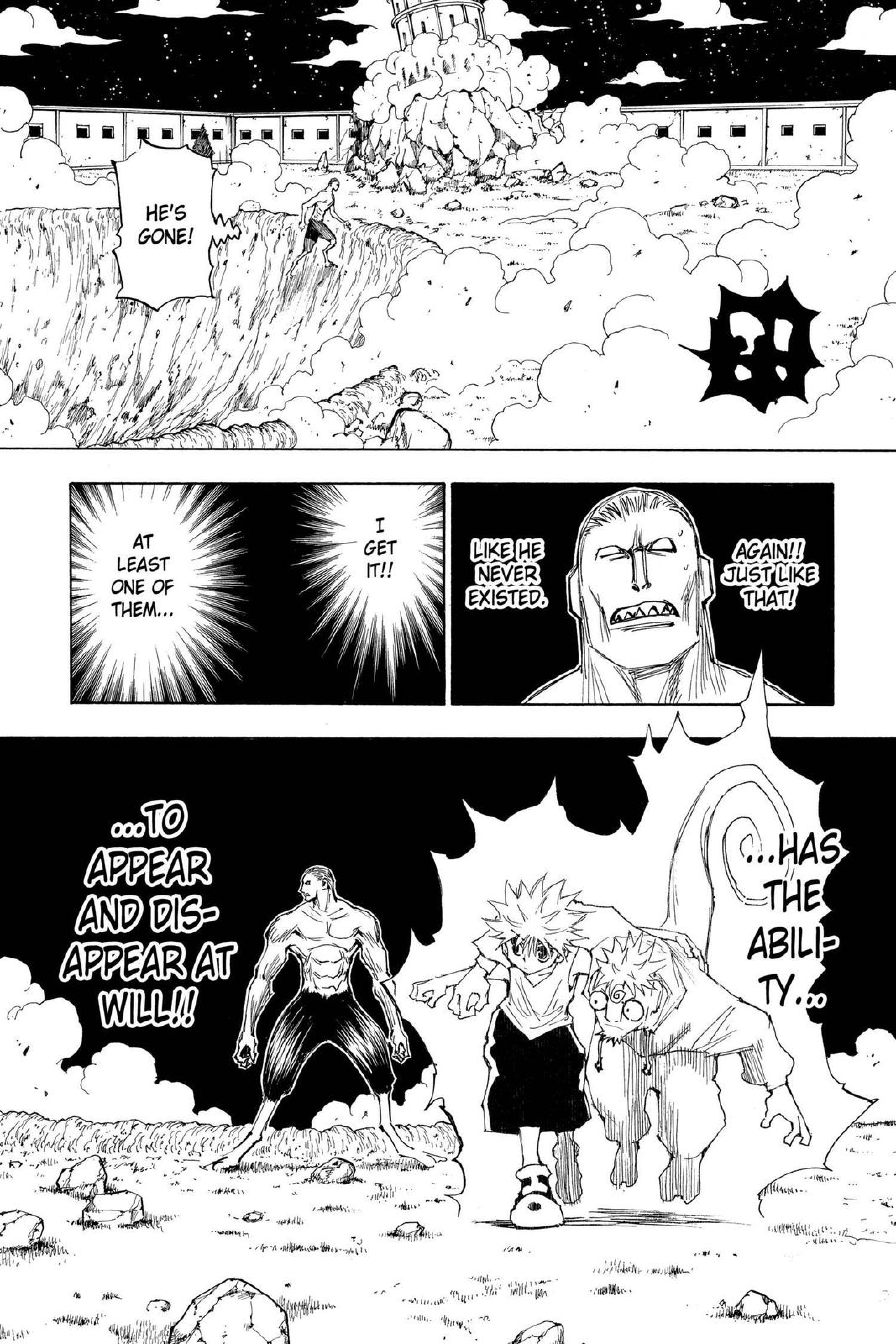

...OR TRANSFORM. KILLUA INCAPACITATED YOUPI.
SUCH WAS THE DISPARITY IN INITIATIVE.
KILLUA'S GODSPEED ELECTRIFIED HIS ENTIRE BODY...
...FORCING SPEEDS THAT TRANSCENDED EVEN THE LIMITS OF HIS PHYSICAL POTENTIAL.
KA BAM
KILLUA DIVIDED IT INTO TWO CORE FUNCTIONS.
SHK

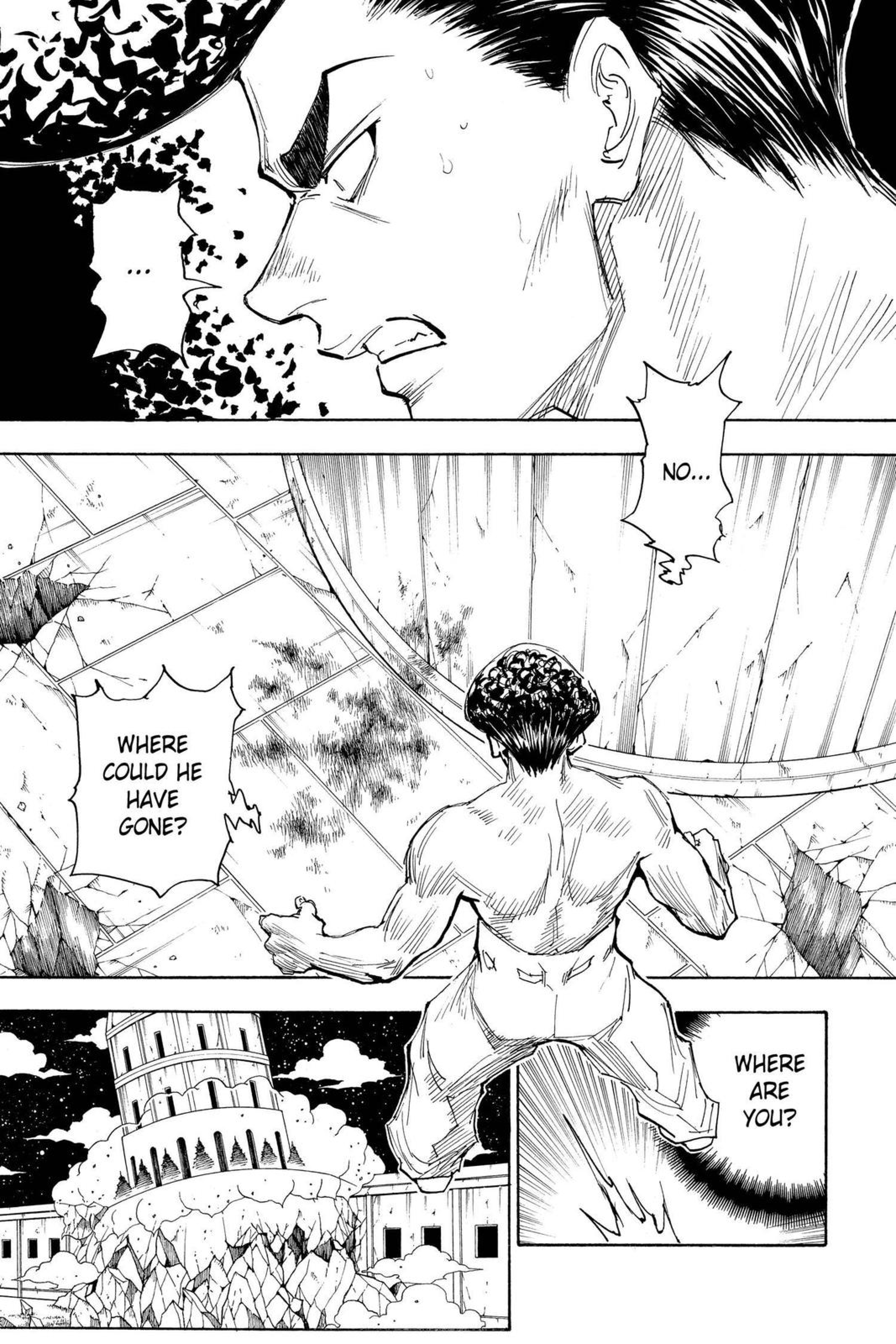

"SPEED OF LIGHTNING," WHICH ALLOWED HIM TO OPERATE HIS BODY AT SUPERHUMAN SPEEDS...
...AND "WHIRLWIND," WHICH CONTROLLED HIS BODY AUTOMATICALLY IN RESPONSE TO HIS OPPONENT'S ACTIONS.
STOPPING THE FISH DART...
...UTILIZED THE LATTER.
GMP
IT WAS A PREVIOUSLY PROGRAMMED RESPONSE TO THE MALEVOLENT INTENT IN ENEMY AURA.
A REFLEX THAT BYPASSED THE COMPARATIVELY SLOW HUMAN BRAIN...
...EASILY SURPASSING THE ENEMY'S
...PHYSICAL SPEED.

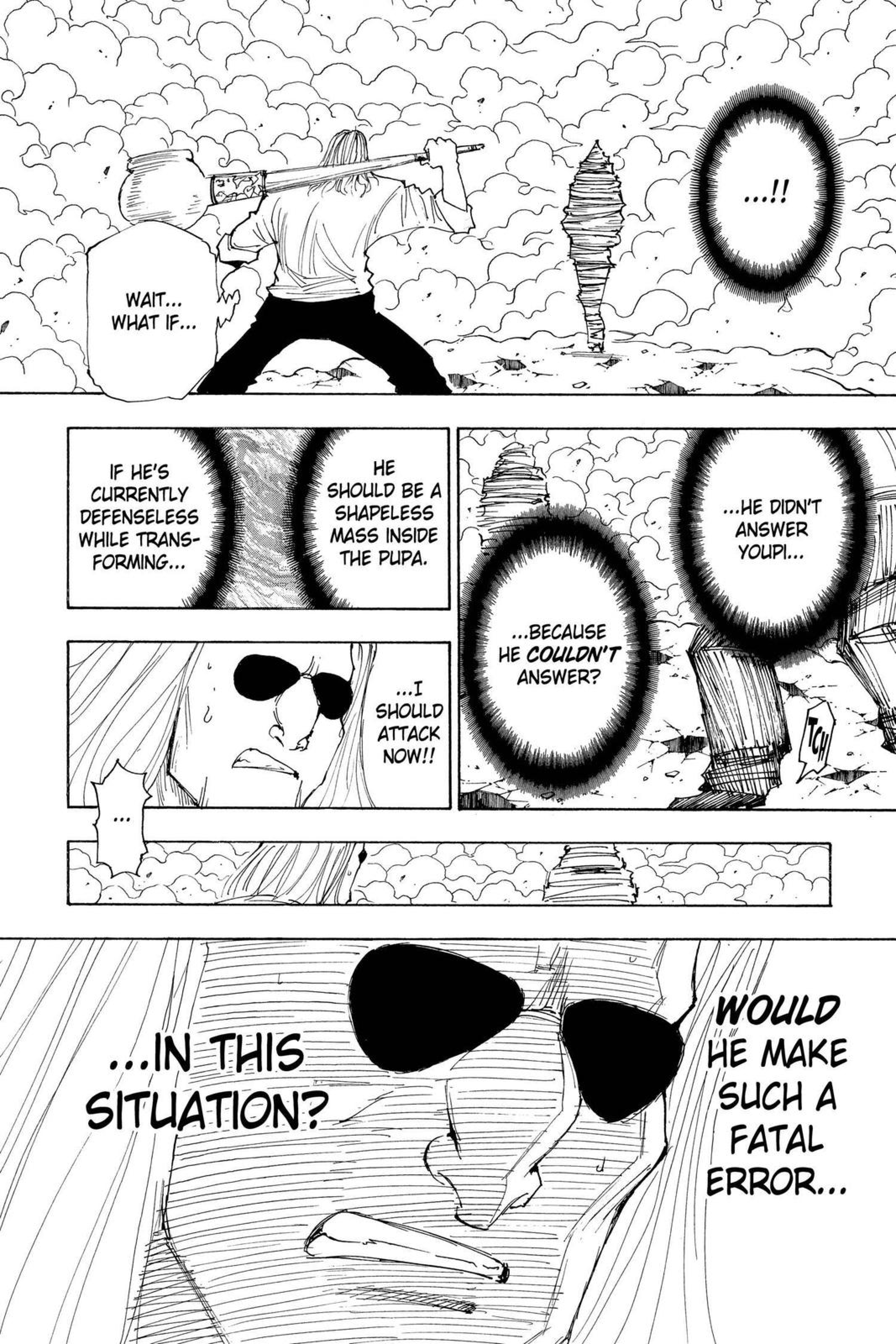

WHAT THE HECK...
...IS GOING ON?
BAM
IN TERMS OF SHEER POWER...
...THEY'RE ALL LESS THAN A *TENTH* OF MY STRENGTH.
YET I CAN'T DO A THING.
I DON'T GET IT!!

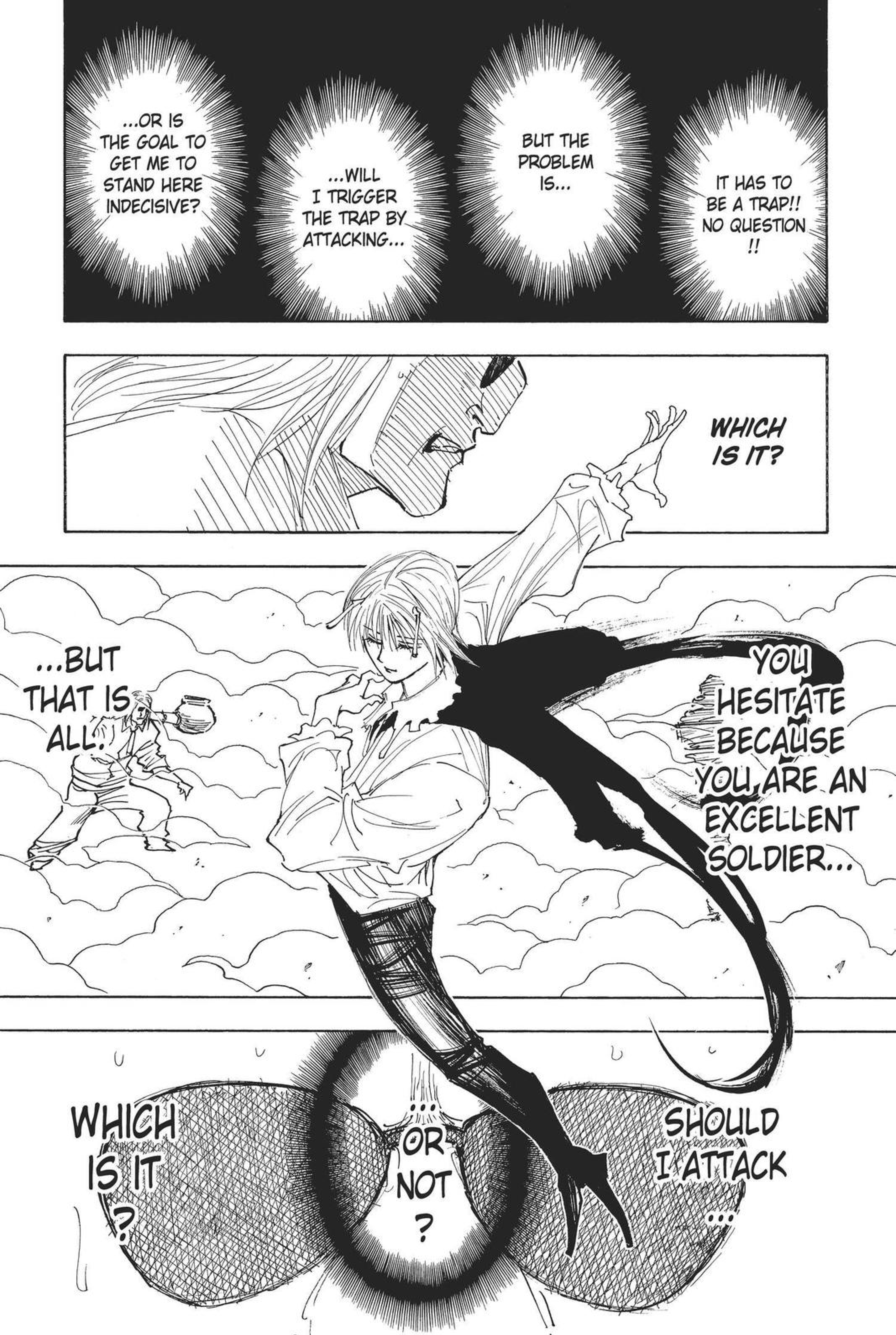

WHIRLWIND
AURA IS DEEP...
DAMN...
THIS CHANGE IN ATTITUDE...
...WOULD LEAD YOUPI TO A SURPRISING CHOICE...
THIS IS GETTING A LITTLE INTERESTING.
?
HEH HEH
IT'S THE FIRST TIME...
...I'VE ENJOYED A STRUGGLE.
...IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

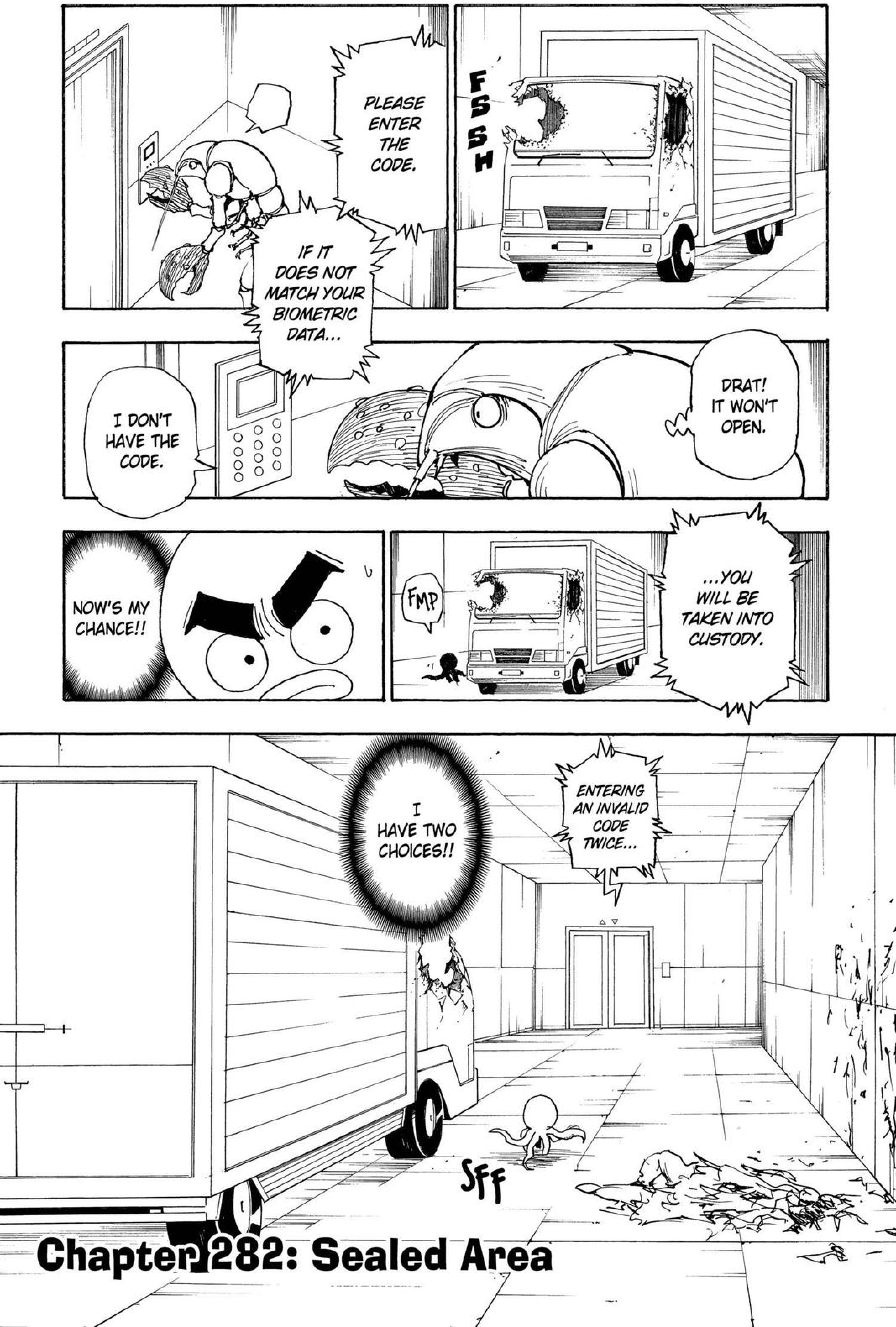

ZT
ZK
HSST
!
OOPS... I USED IT ALL UP ALREADY.
FFT
!
STOP!!!
FFT
YOU WON'T GET AWAY!!
YOU'LL STAY WITH ME...
...UNTIL YOU DIE!


HE'S GONE!
?!
AGAIN!! JUST LIKE THAT!
LIKE HE NEVER EXISTED.
I GET IT!!
AT LEAST ONE OF THEM...
...HAS THE ABILITY...
...TO APPEAR AND DISAPPEAR AT WILL!!

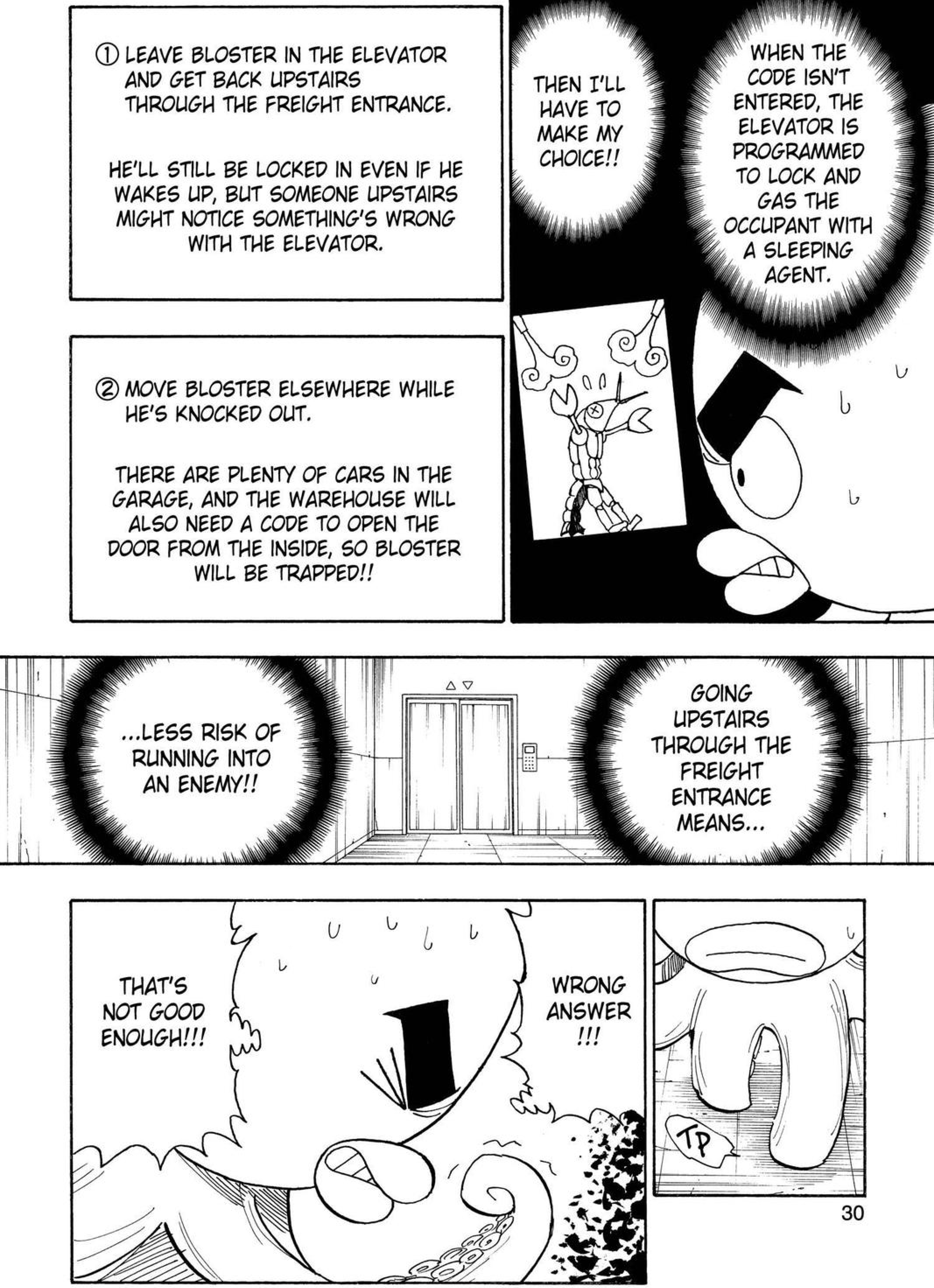

...
NO...
WHERE COULD HE HAVE GONE?
WHERE ARE YOU?

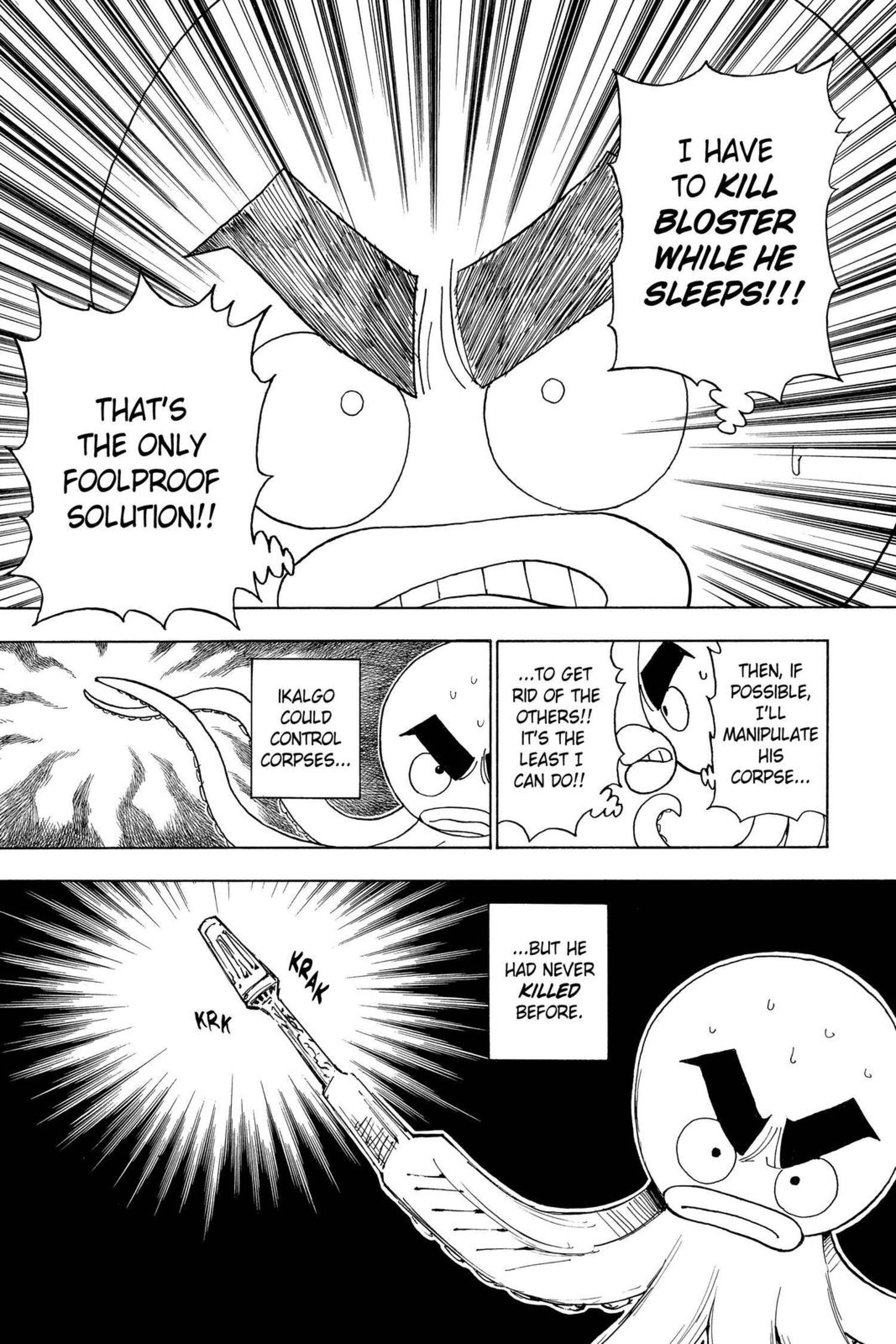

...!!
WAIT... WHAT IF...
...HE DIDN'T ANSWER YOUPI...
...BECAUSE HE *COULDN'T* ANSWER?
TCH
HE SHOULD BE A SHAPELESS MASS INSIDE THE PUPA.
IF HE'S CURRENTLY DEFENSELESS WHILE TRANSFORMING...
...I SHOULD ATTACK NOW!!
...
WOULD HE MAKE SUCH A FATAL ERROR...
...IN THIS SITUATION?

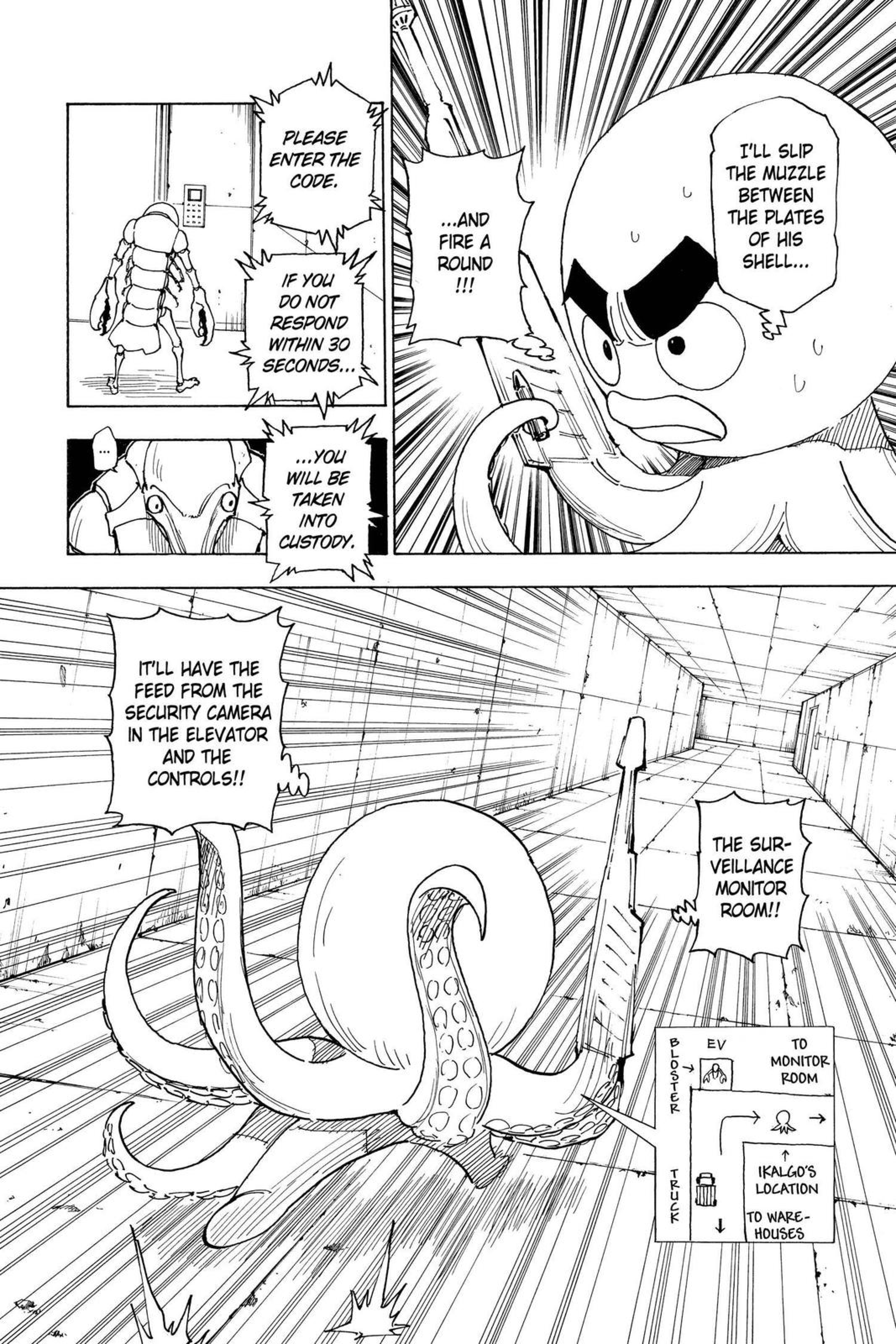

IT HAS TO BE A TRAP!! NO QUESTION !!
BUT THE PROBLEM IS...
...WILL I TRIGGER THE TRAP BY ATTACKING...
...OR IS THE GOAL TO GET ME TO STAND HERE INDECISIVE?
WHICH IS IT?
YOU HESITATE BECAUSE YOU ARE AN EXCELLENT SOLDIER...
...BUT THAT IS ALL.
SHOULD I ATTACK ...
...OR NOT ?
WHICH IS IT ?


FSSH
PLEASE ENTER THE CODE.
IF IT DOES NOT MATCH YOUR BIOMETRIC DATA...
DRAT! IT WON'T OPEN.
I DON'T HAVE THE CODE.
...YOU WILL BE TAKEN INTO CUSTODY.
FMP
NOW'S MY CHANCE!!
ENTERING AN INVALID CODE TWICE...
I HAVE TWO CHOICES!!
SFF

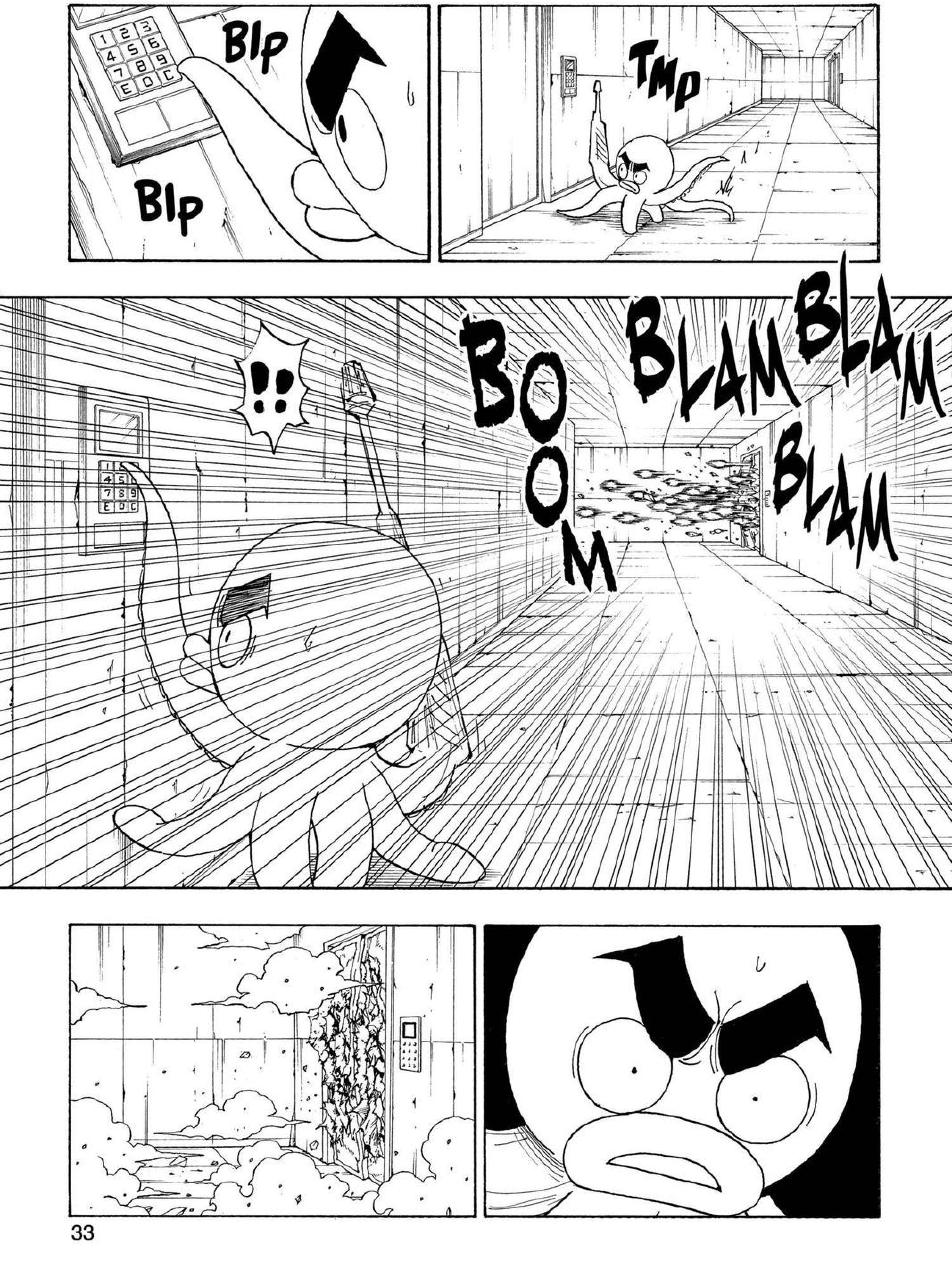
Chapter 282: Sealed Area

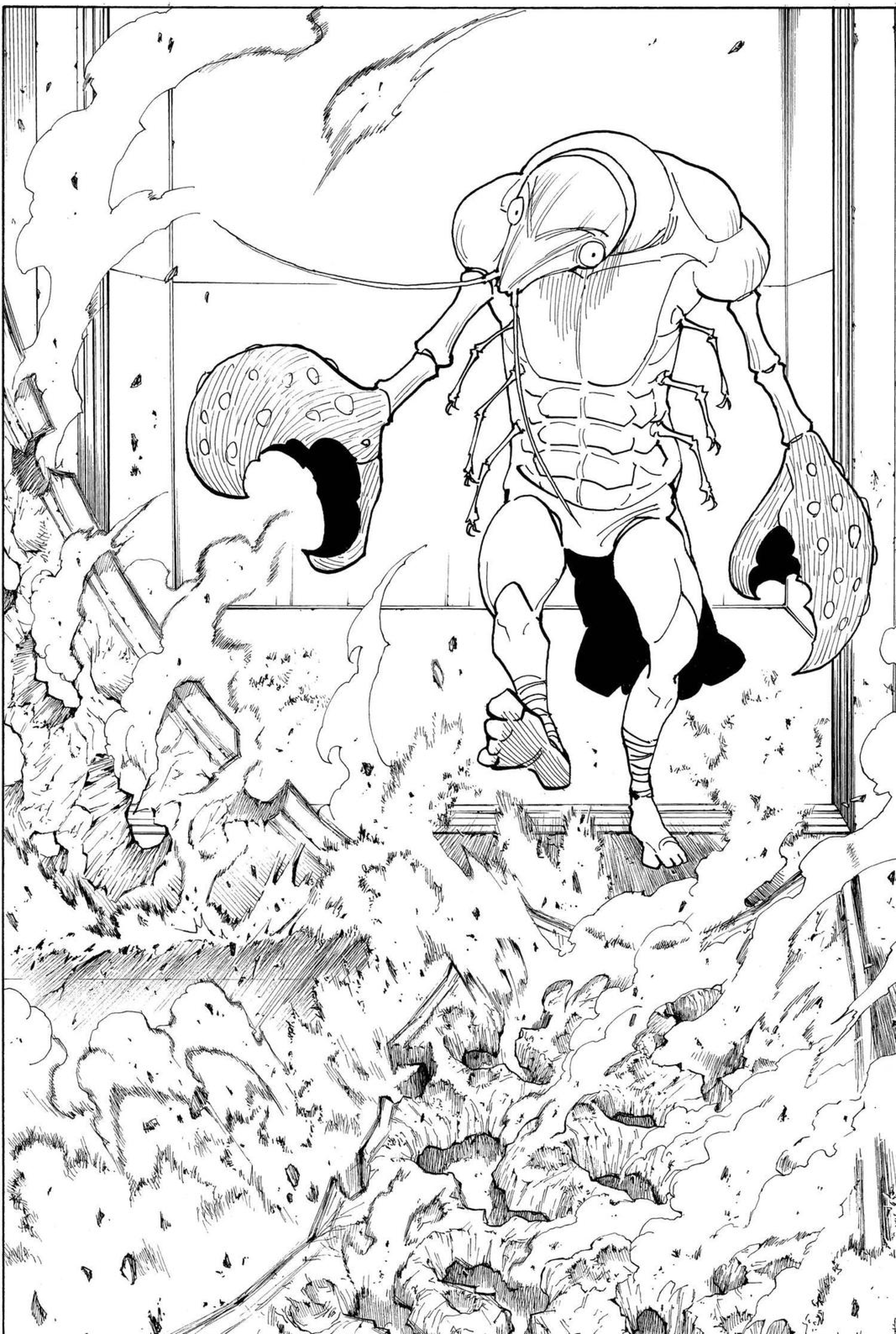

WHEN THE CODE ISN'T ENTERED, THE ELEVATOR IS PROGRAMMED TO LOCK AND GAS THE OCCUPANT WITH A SLEEPING AGENT.
THEN I'LL HAVE TO MAKE MY CHOICE!!
① LEAVE BLOSTER IN THE ELEVATOR AND GET BACK UPSTAIRS THROUGH THE FREIGHT ENTRANCE.
HE'LL STILL BE LOCKED IN EVEN IF HE WAKES UP, BUT SOMEONE UPSTAIRS MIGHT NOTICE SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH THE ELEVATOR.
② MOVE BLOSTER ELSEWHERE WHILE HE'S KNOCKED OUT.
THERE ARE PLENTY OF CARS IN THE GARAGE, AND THE WAREHOUSE WILL ALSO NEED A CODE TO OPEN THE DOOR FROM THE INSIDE, SO BLOSTER WILL BE TRAPPED!!
GOING UPSTAIRS THROUGH THE FREIGHT ENTRANCE MEANS...
...LESS RISK OF RUNNING INTO AN ENEMY!!
TP
WRONG ANSWER!!!
THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH!!!

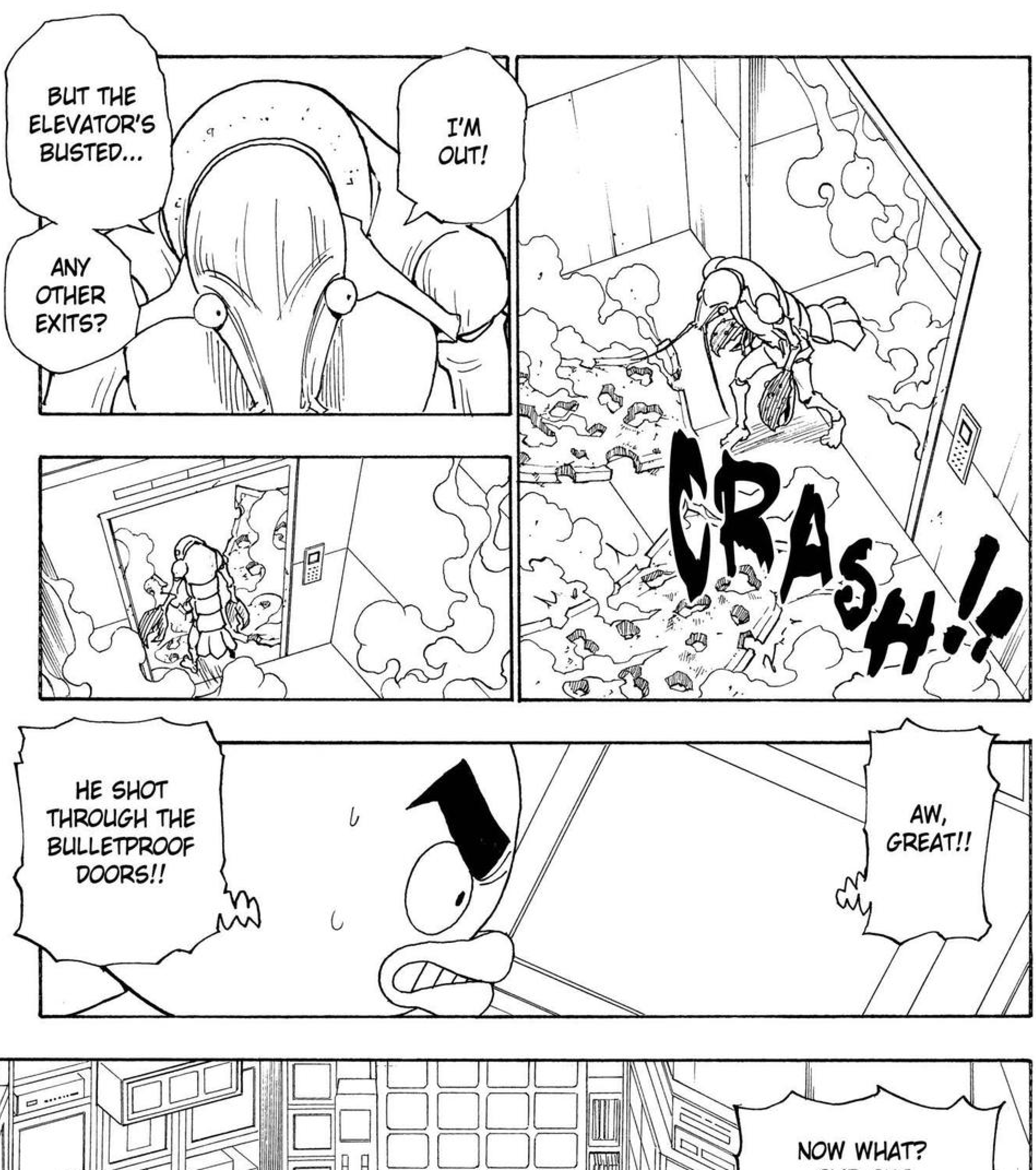

I HAVE TO KILL BLOSTER WHILE HE SLEEPS!!!
THAT'S THE ONLY FOOLPROOF SOLUTION!!
THEN, IF POSSIBLE, I'LL MANIPULATE HIS CORPSE...
...TO GET RID OF THE OTHERS!! IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO!!
IKALGO COULD CONTROL CORPSES...
...BUT HE HAD NEVER KILLED BEFORE.
KRAK
KRK

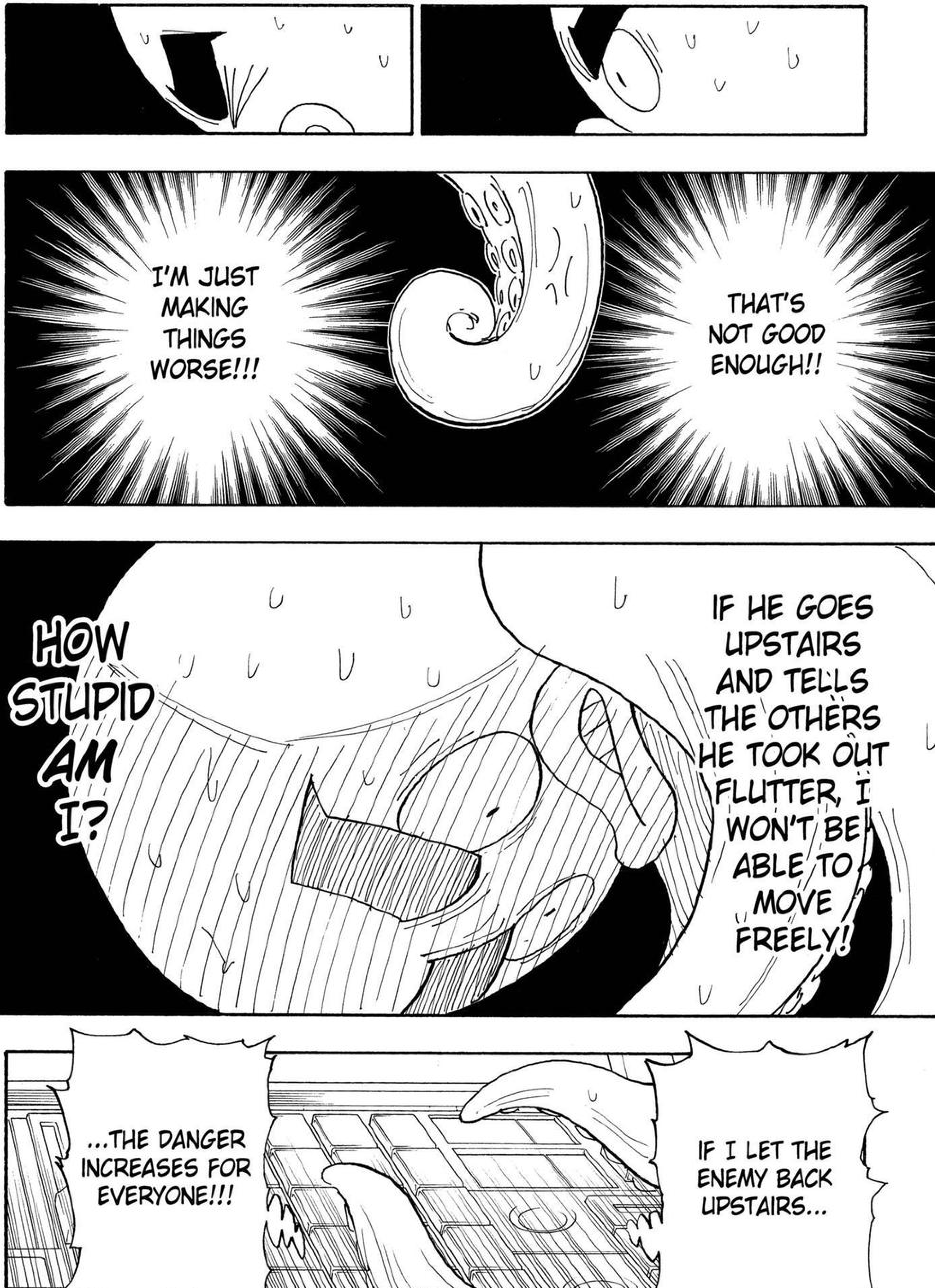

I'LL SLIP THE MUZZLE BETWEEN THE PLATES OF HIS SHELL...
...AND FIRE A ROUND!!!
PLEASE ENTER THE CODE.
IF YOU DO NOT RESPOND WITHIN 30 SECONDS...
...
...YOU WILL BE TAKEN INTO CUSTODY.
THE SURVEILLANCE MONITOR ROOM!!
IT'LL HAVE THE FEED FROM THE SECURITY CAMERA IN THE ELEVATOR AND THE CONTROLS!!
BLOSTER
EV
TO MONITOR ROOM
IKALGO'S LOCATION
TRUCK
TO WAREHOUSES

READ THIS WAY

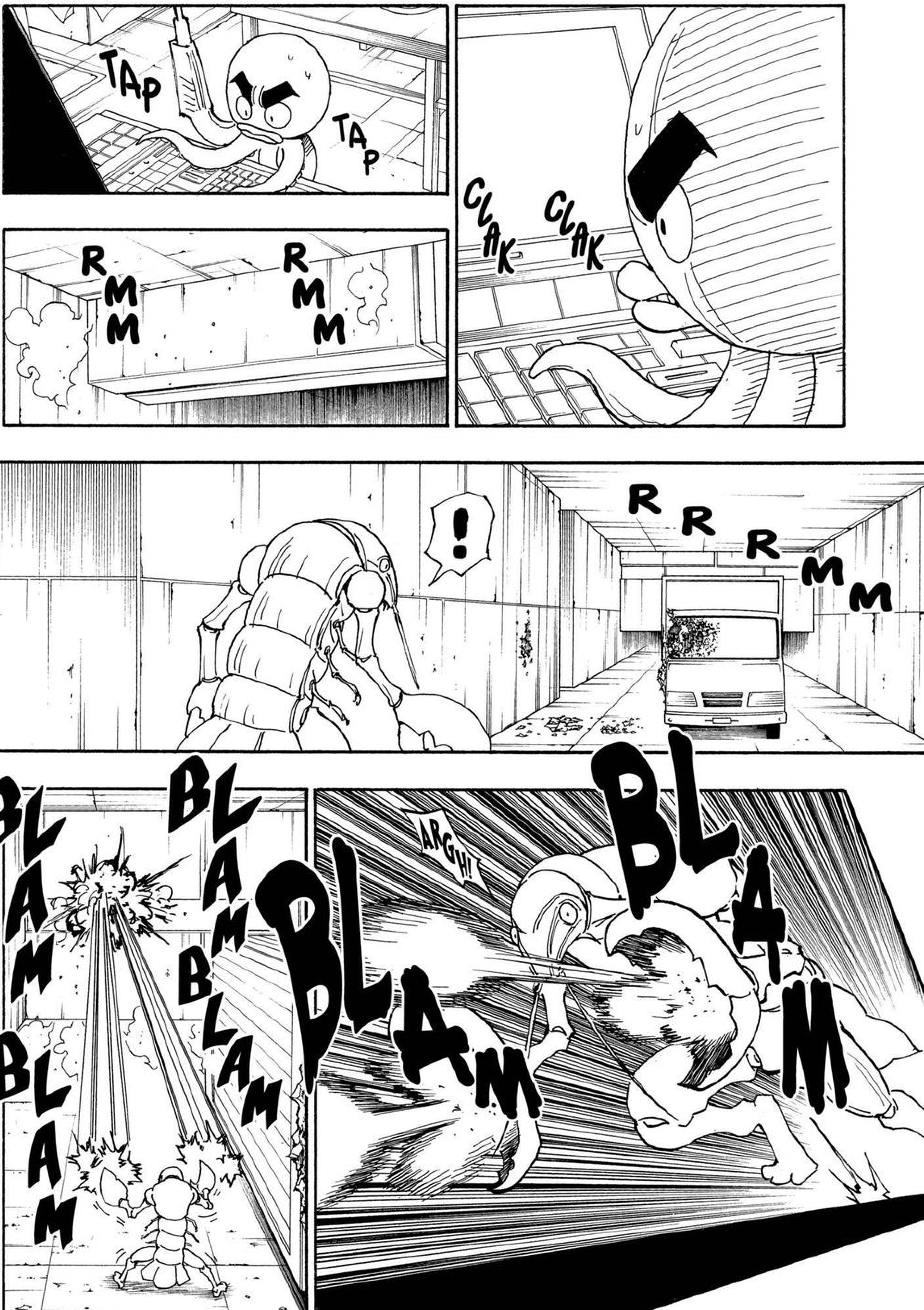

TMP
BIP
BIP
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BOOM
!!

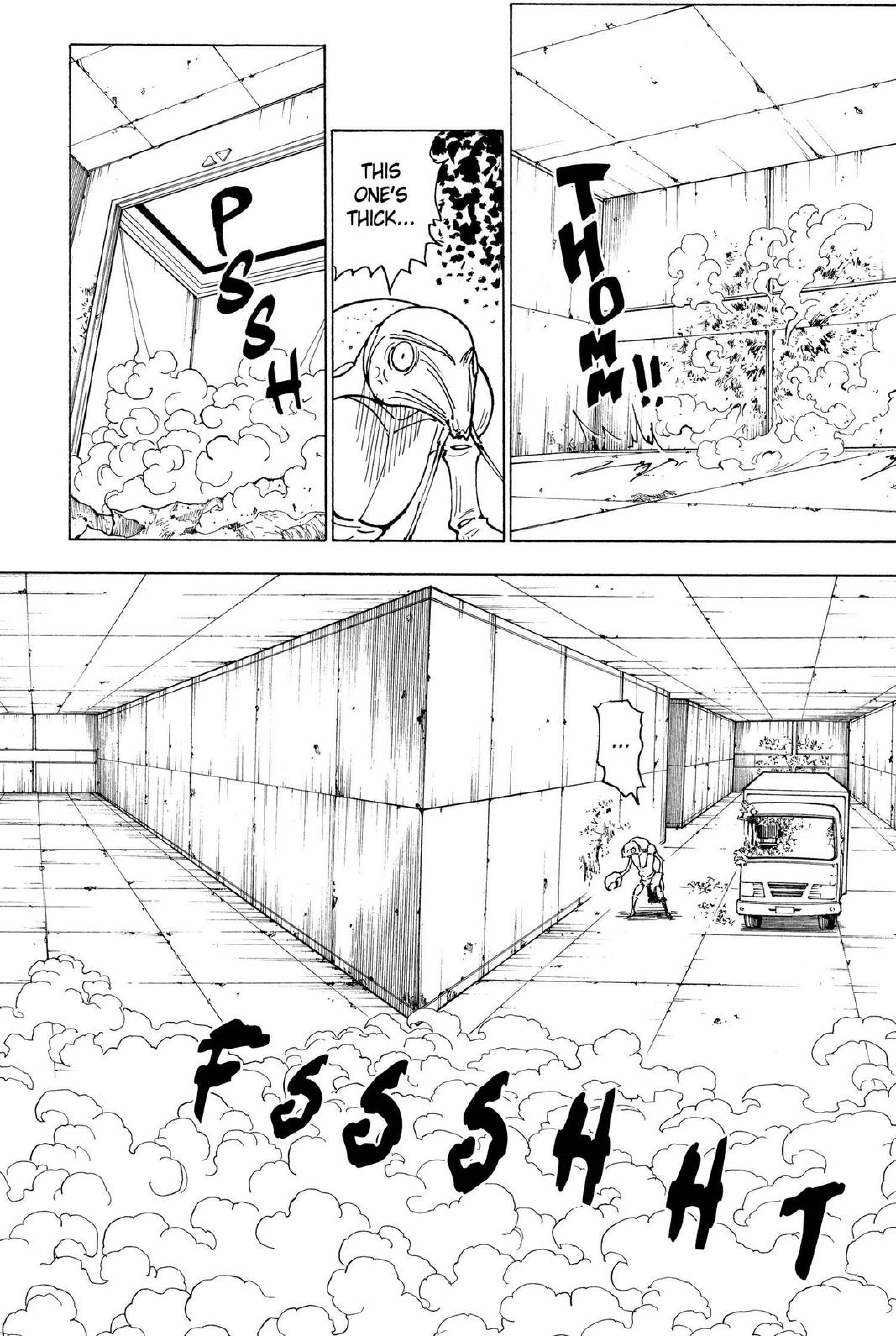



I'M OUT!
BUT THE ELEVATOR'S BUSTED...
ANY OTHER EXITS?
CRASH!!
AW, GREAT!!
HE SHOT THROUGH THE BULLETPROOF DOORS!!
NOW WHAT? SLIP OUT THROUGH THE FREIGHT ENTRANCE WHILE HE'S NOT LOOKING? HIDE UNTIL HE'S GONE?
EITHER WAY, IF HE GOES BACK UPSTAIRS...

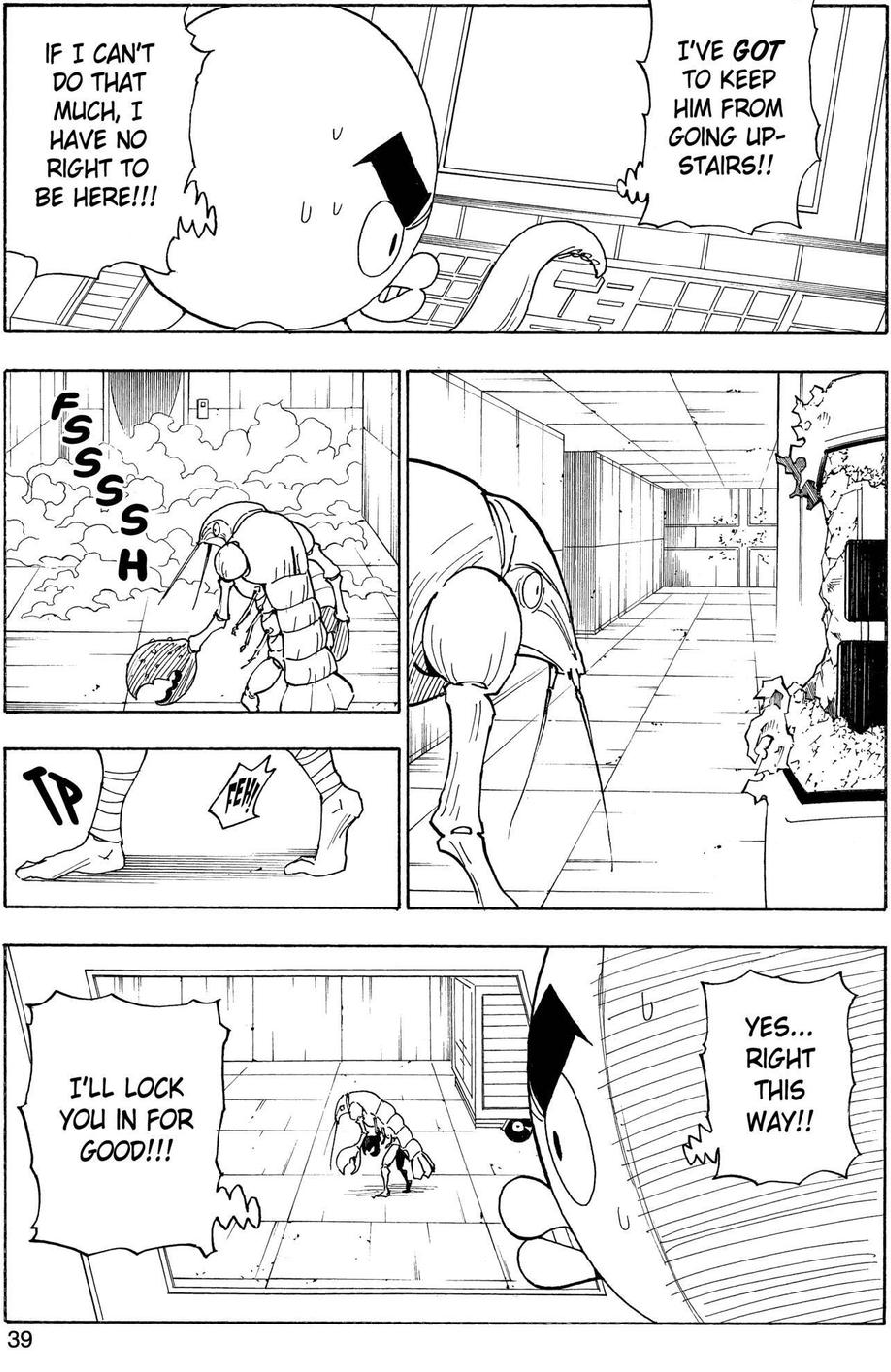

THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH!!
I'M JUST MAKING THINGS WORSE!!!
IF HE GOES UPSTAIRS AND TELLS THE OTHERS HE TOOK OUT FLUTTER, I WON'T BE ABLE TO MOVE FREELY!
HOW STUPID AM I?
IF I LET THE ENEMY BACK UPSTAIRS...
...THE DANGER INCREASES FOR EVERYONE!!!

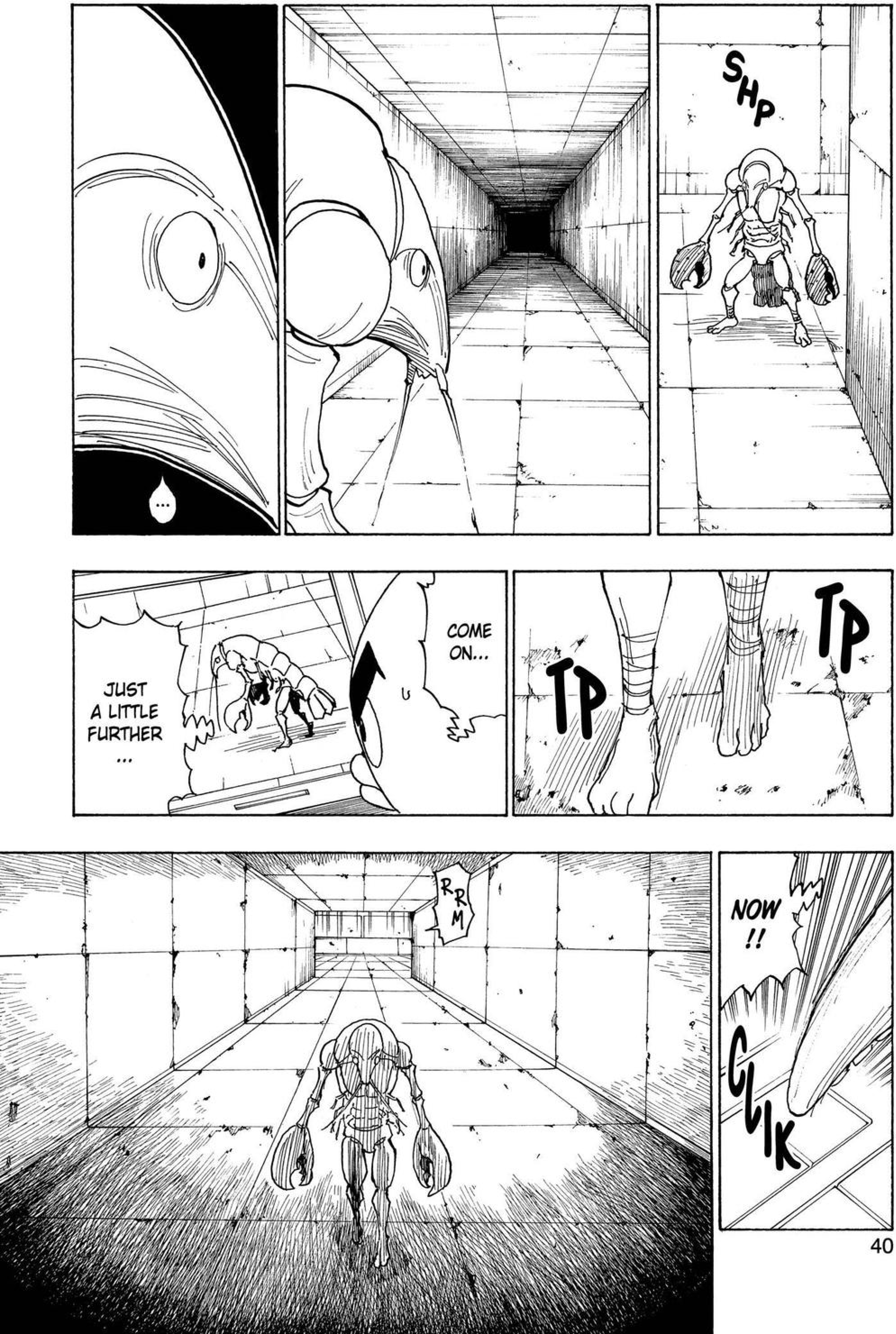
READ THIS WAY

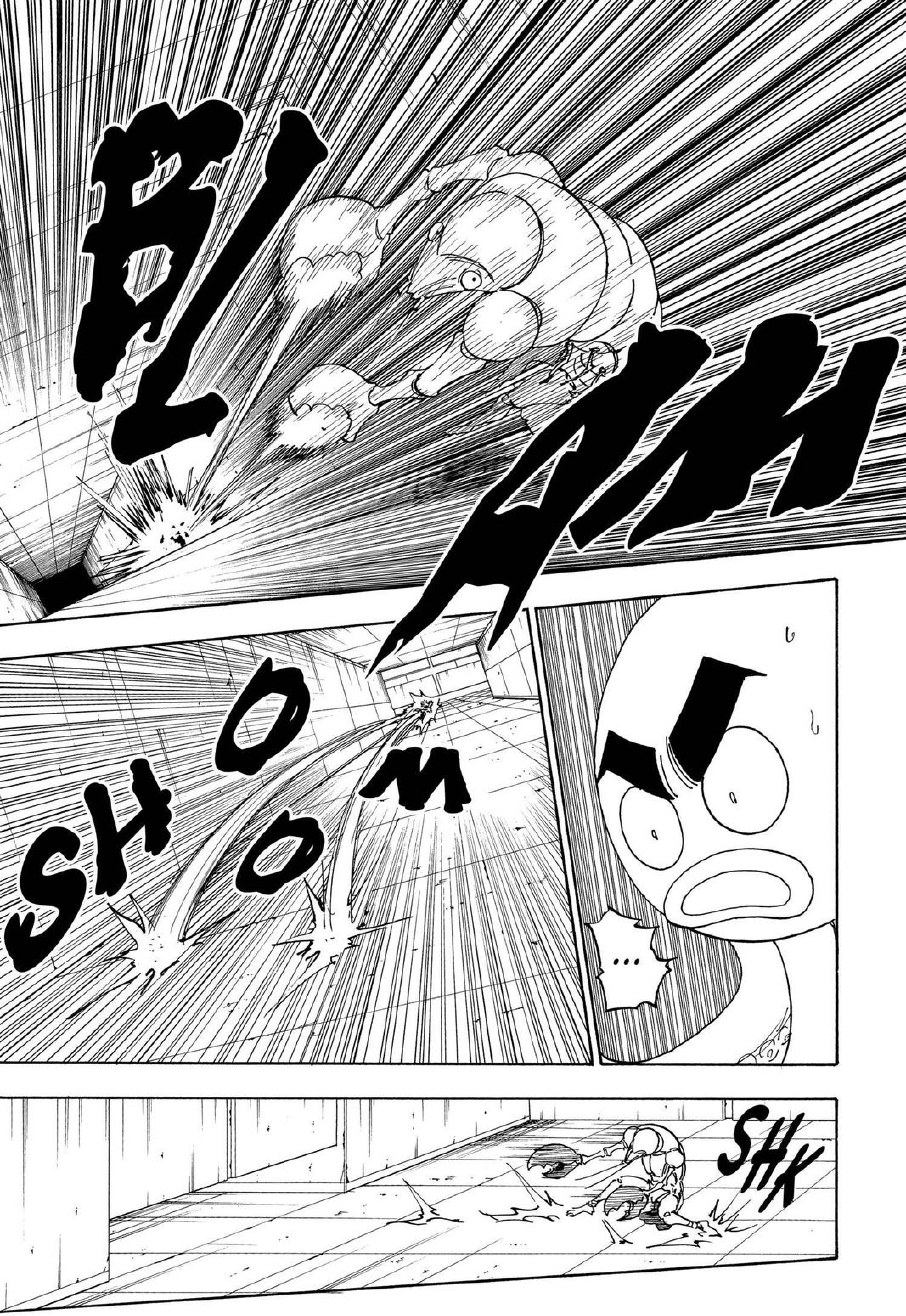

CLAK
CLAK
TAP
TAP
RMM
RMM
!
RRRMM
ARGH!
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM BLAM
BLAM BLAM

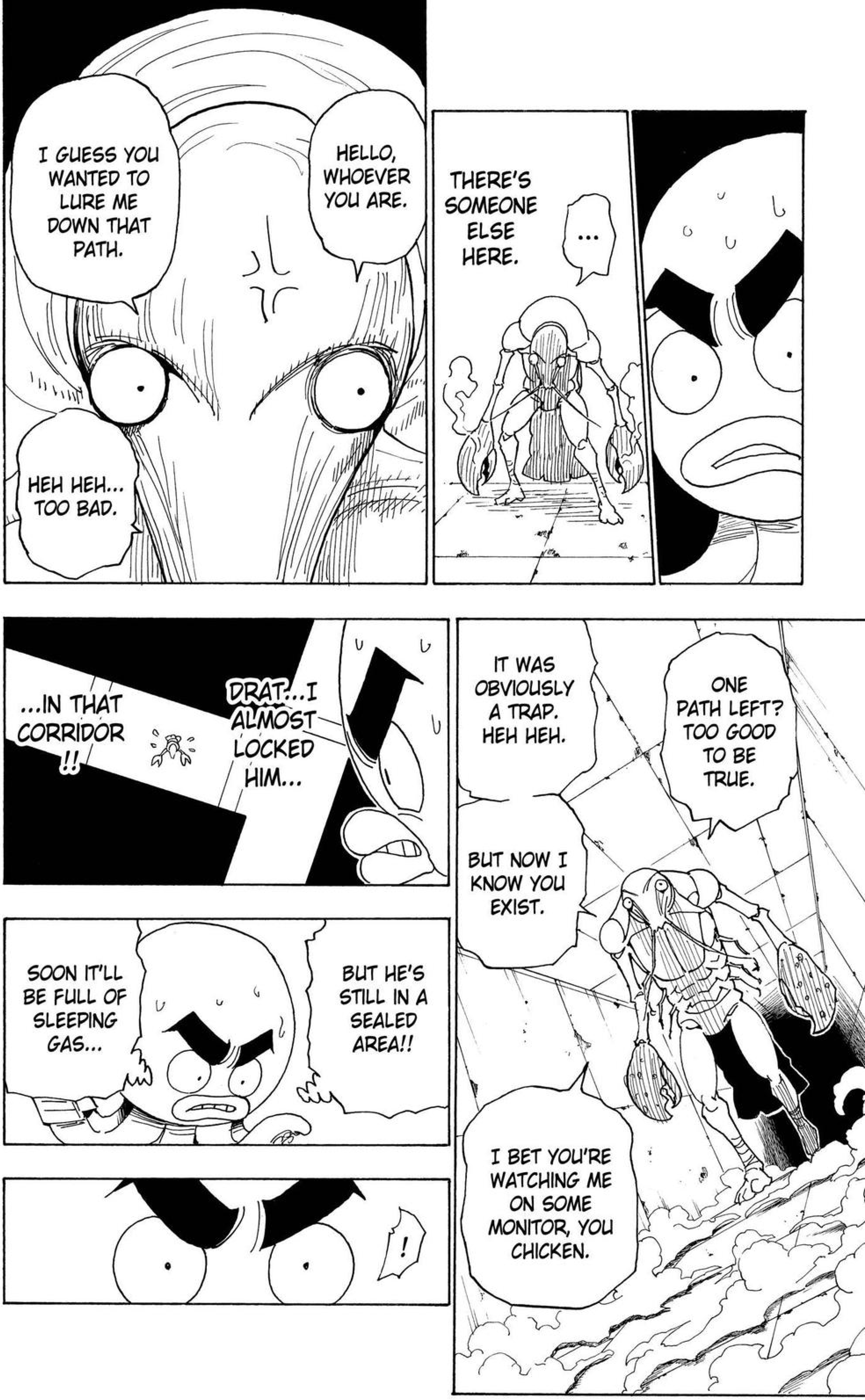

THOMM!!
THIS ONE'S THICK...
PSSH
...
FSSSHHT

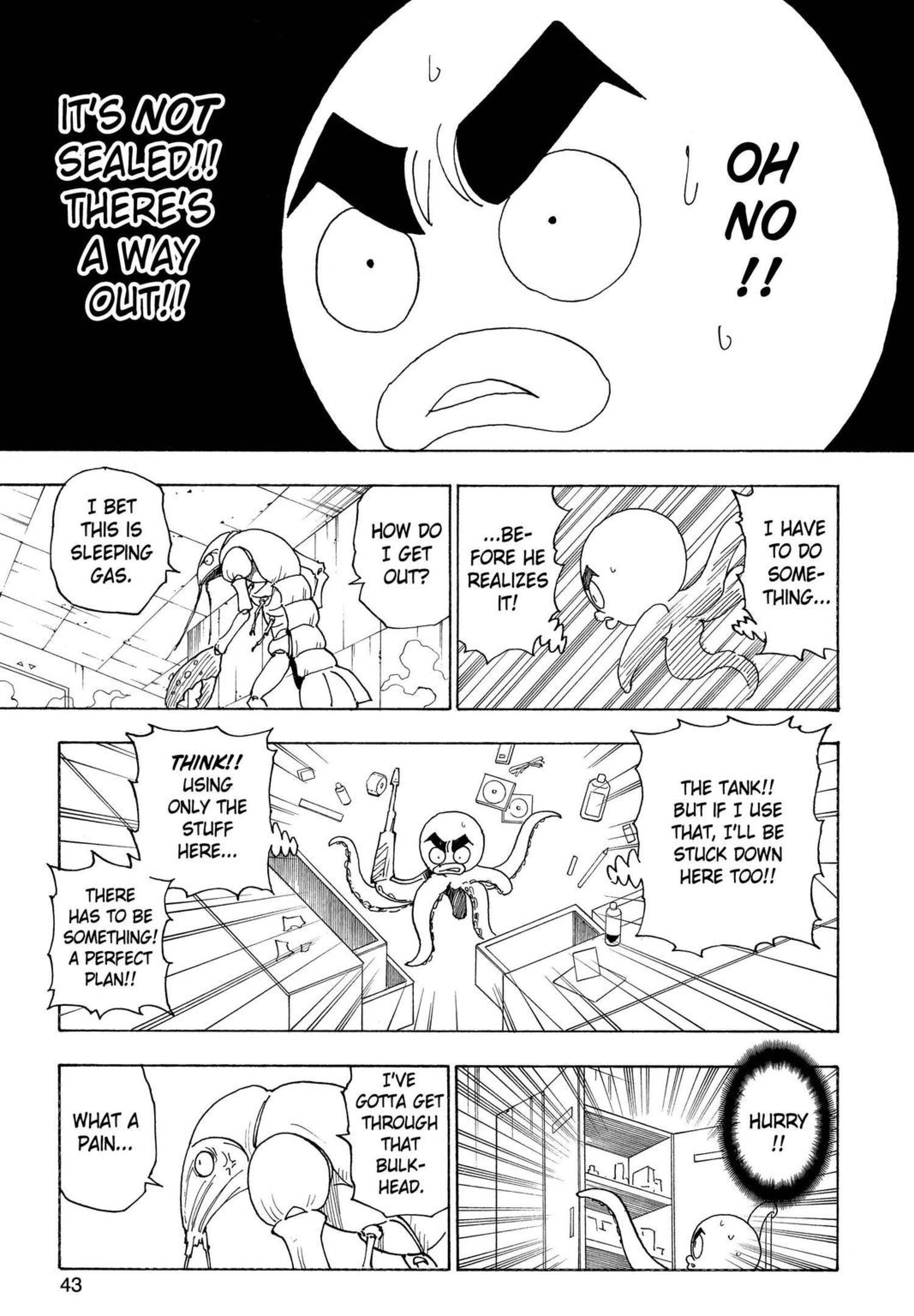
READ THIS WAY

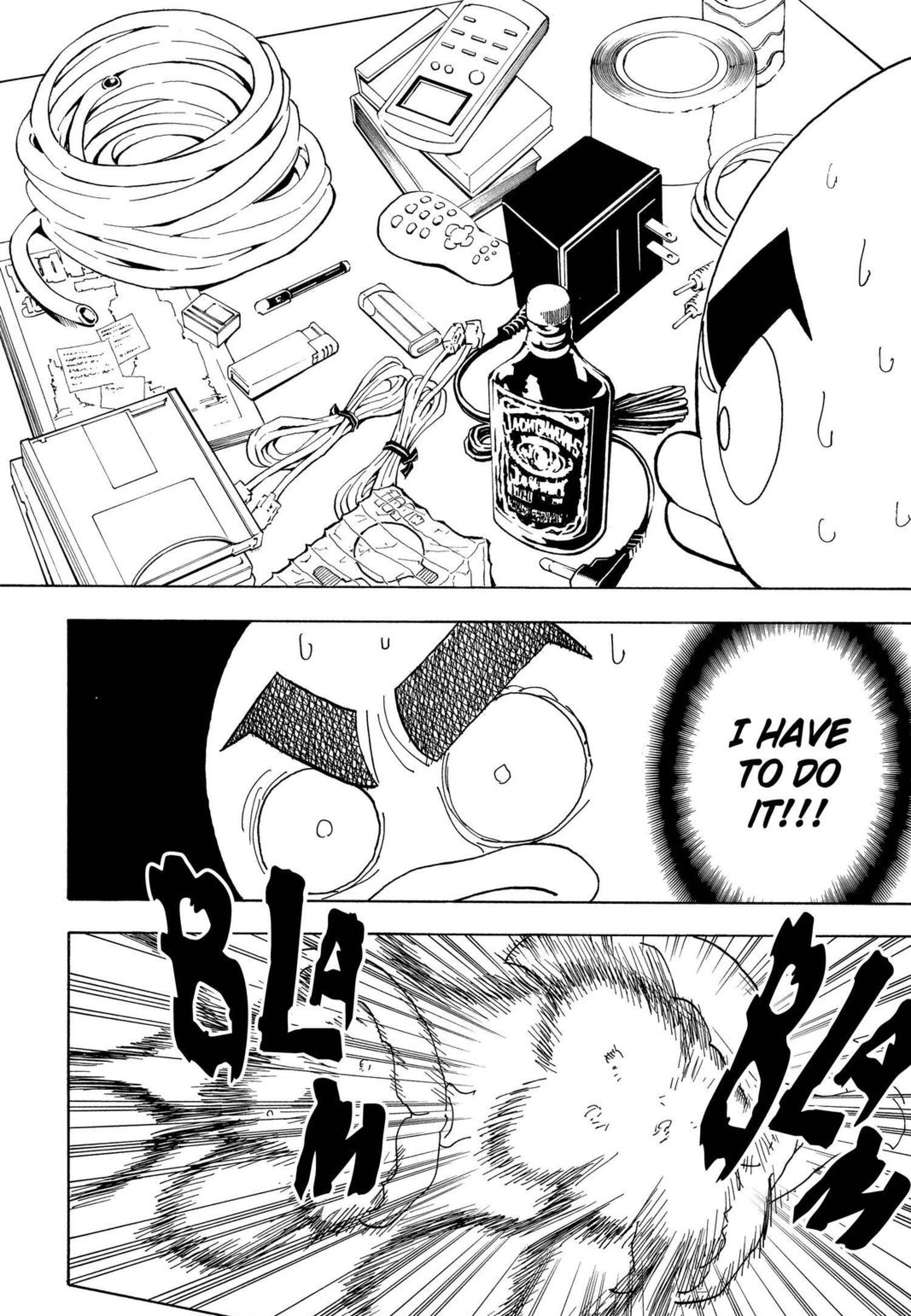

I'VE **GOT** TO KEEP HIM FROM GOING UPSTAIRS!!
IF I CAN'T DO THAT MUCH, I HAVE NO RIGHT TO BE HERE!!!
FSSSSH
TP
FEH!
YES... RIGHT THIS WAY!!
I'LL LOCK YOU IN FOR GOOD!!!

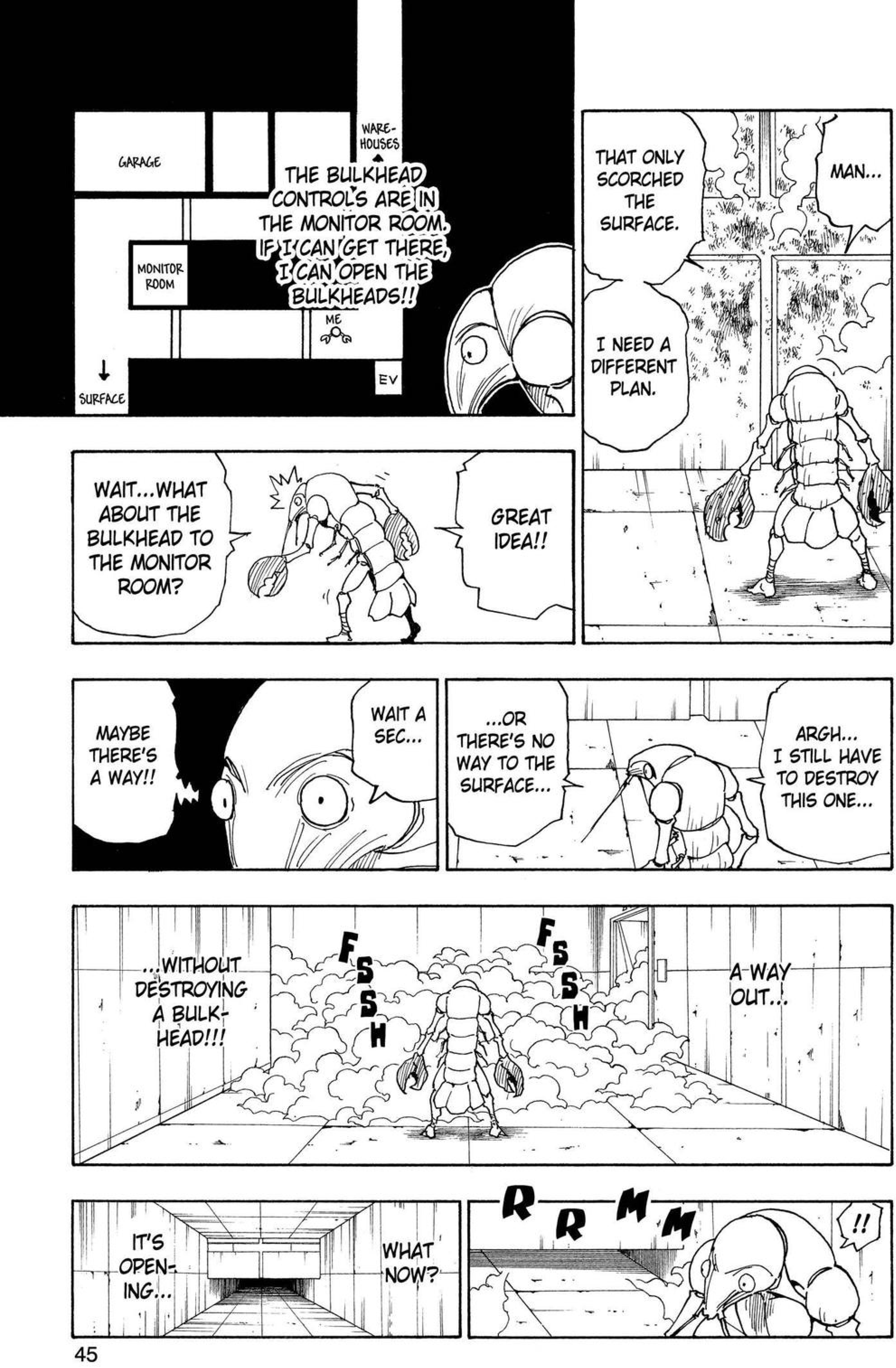

SHP
...
TP
TP
COME ON...
JUST A LITTLE FURTHER...
NOW!!
CLIK
RRM

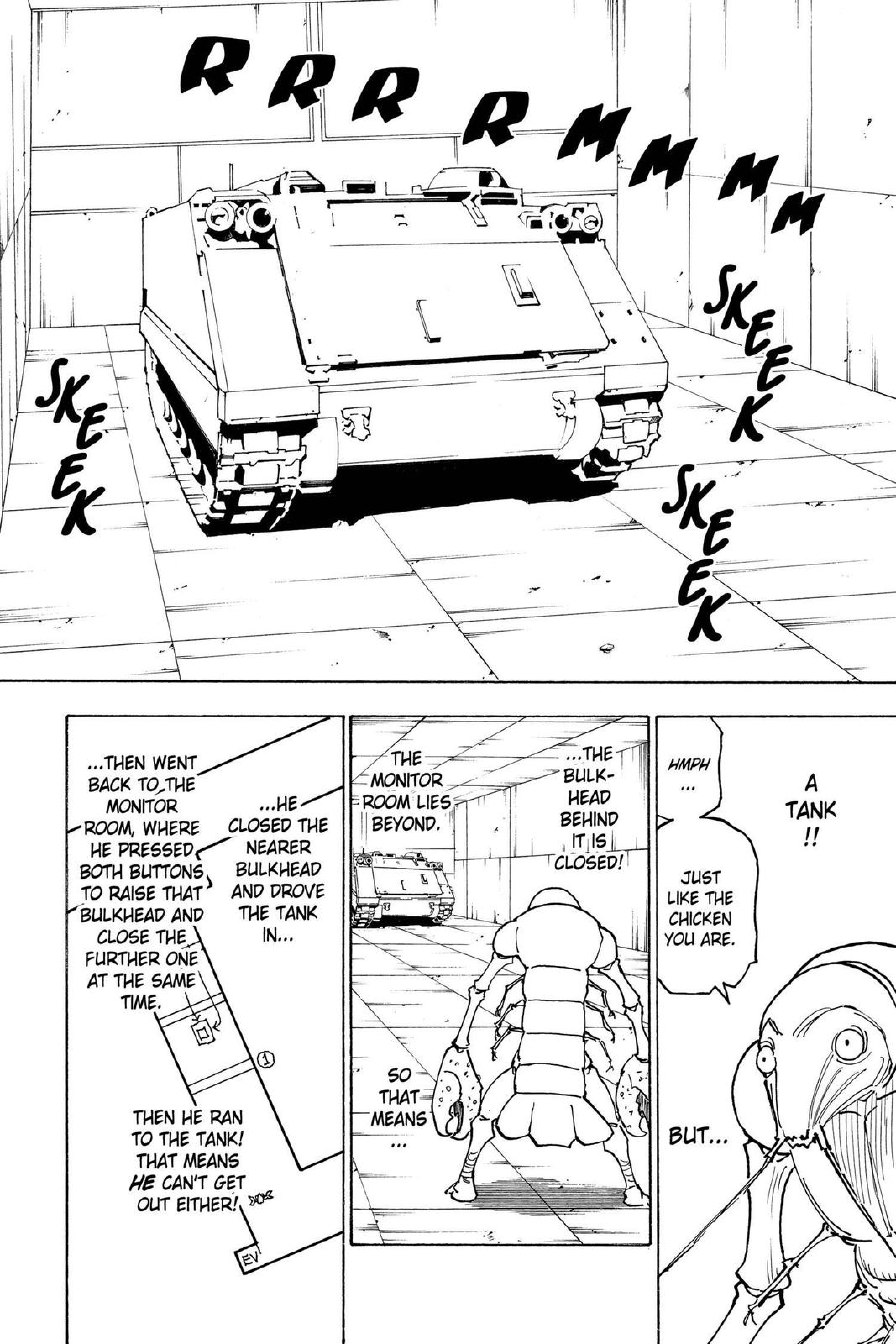

BLAM
…
SHOOM
SHK

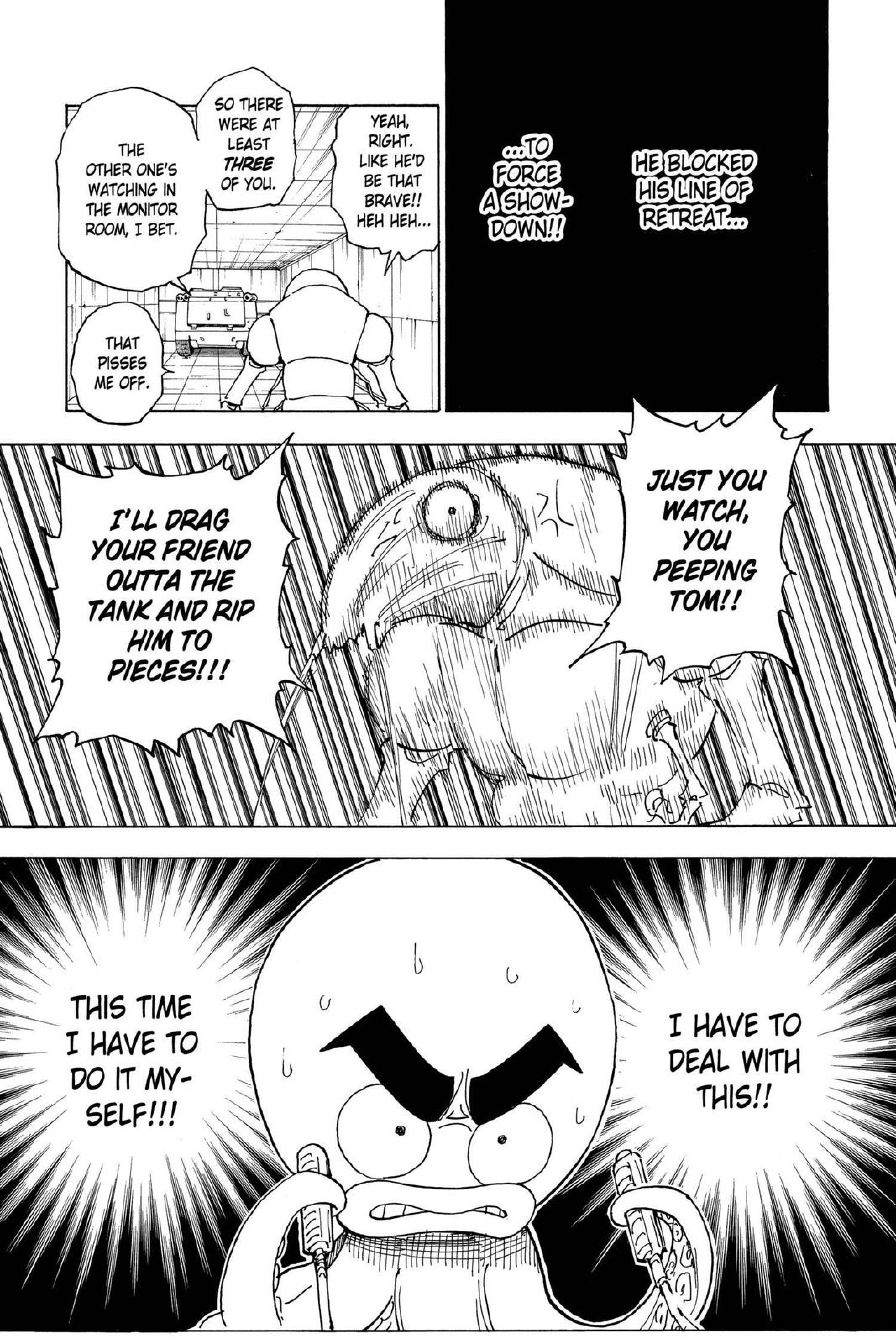

THERE'S SOMEONE ELSE HERE.
...
HELLO, WHOEVER YOU ARE.
I GUESS YOU WANTED TO LURE ME DOWN THAT PATH.
HEH HEH... TOO BAD.
ONE PATH LEFT? TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.
IT WAS OBVIOUSLY A TRAP. HEH HEH.
BUT NOW I KNOW YOU EXIST.
I BET YOU'RE WATCHING ME ON SOME MONITOR, YOU CHICKEN.
DRAT...I ALMOST LOCKED HIM...
...IN THAT CORRIDOR!!
BUT HE'S STILL IN A SEALED AREA!!
SOON IT'LL BE FULL OF SLEEPING GAS...
!


OH NO!!
IT'S *NOT* SEALED!! THERE'S A WAY OUT!!
I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING...
...BEFORE HE REALIZES IT!
HOW DO I GET OUT?
I BET THIS IS SLEEPING GAS.
THE TANK!! BUT IF I USE THAT, I'LL BE STUCK DOWN HERE TOO!!
THINK!! USING ONLY THE STUFF HERE...
THERE HAS TO BE SOMETHING! A PERFECT PLAN!!
HURRY!!
I'VE GOTTA GET THROUGH THAT BULKHEAD.
WHAT A PAIN...

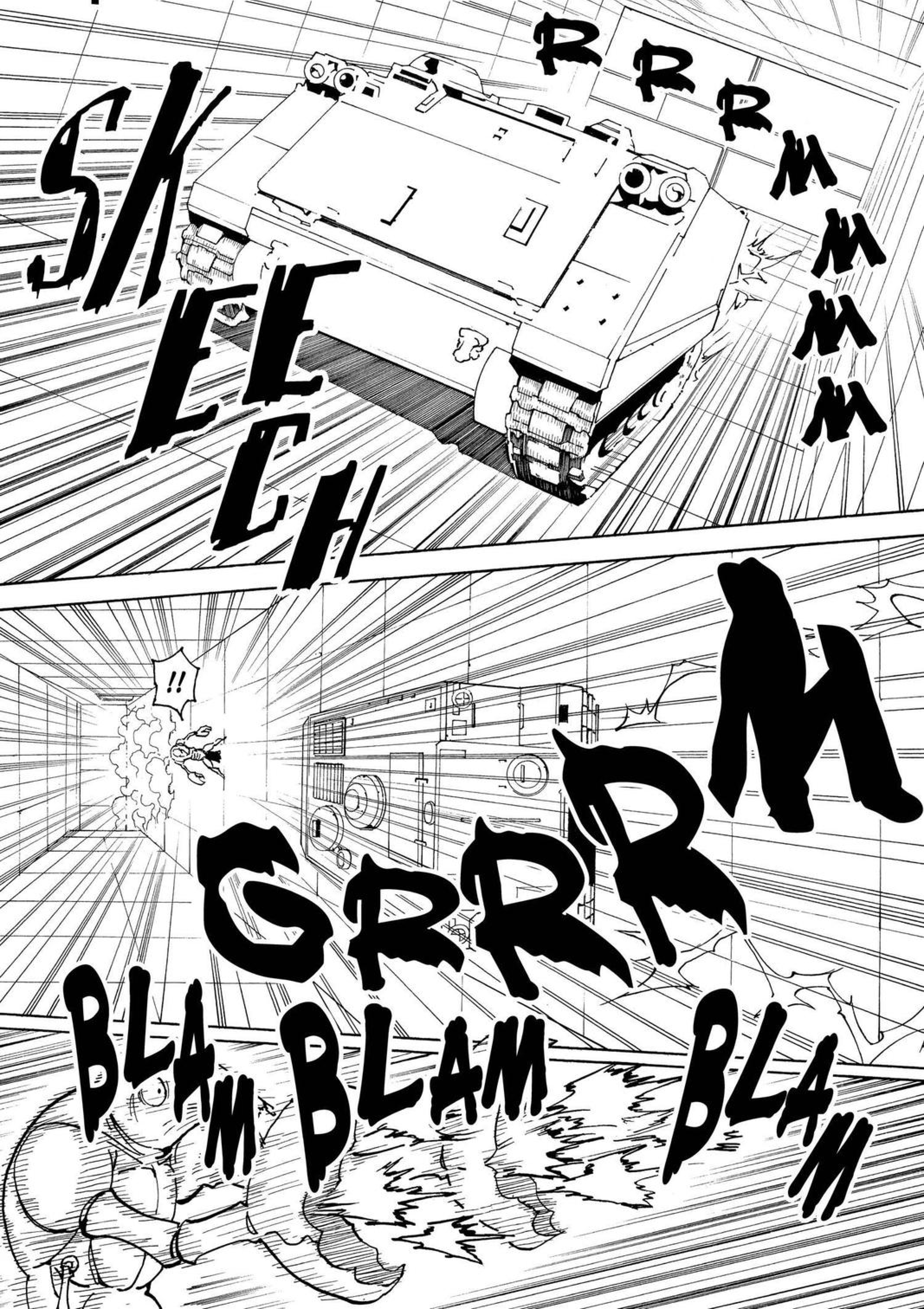

I HAVE TO DO IT!!!
BLAM
BLAM

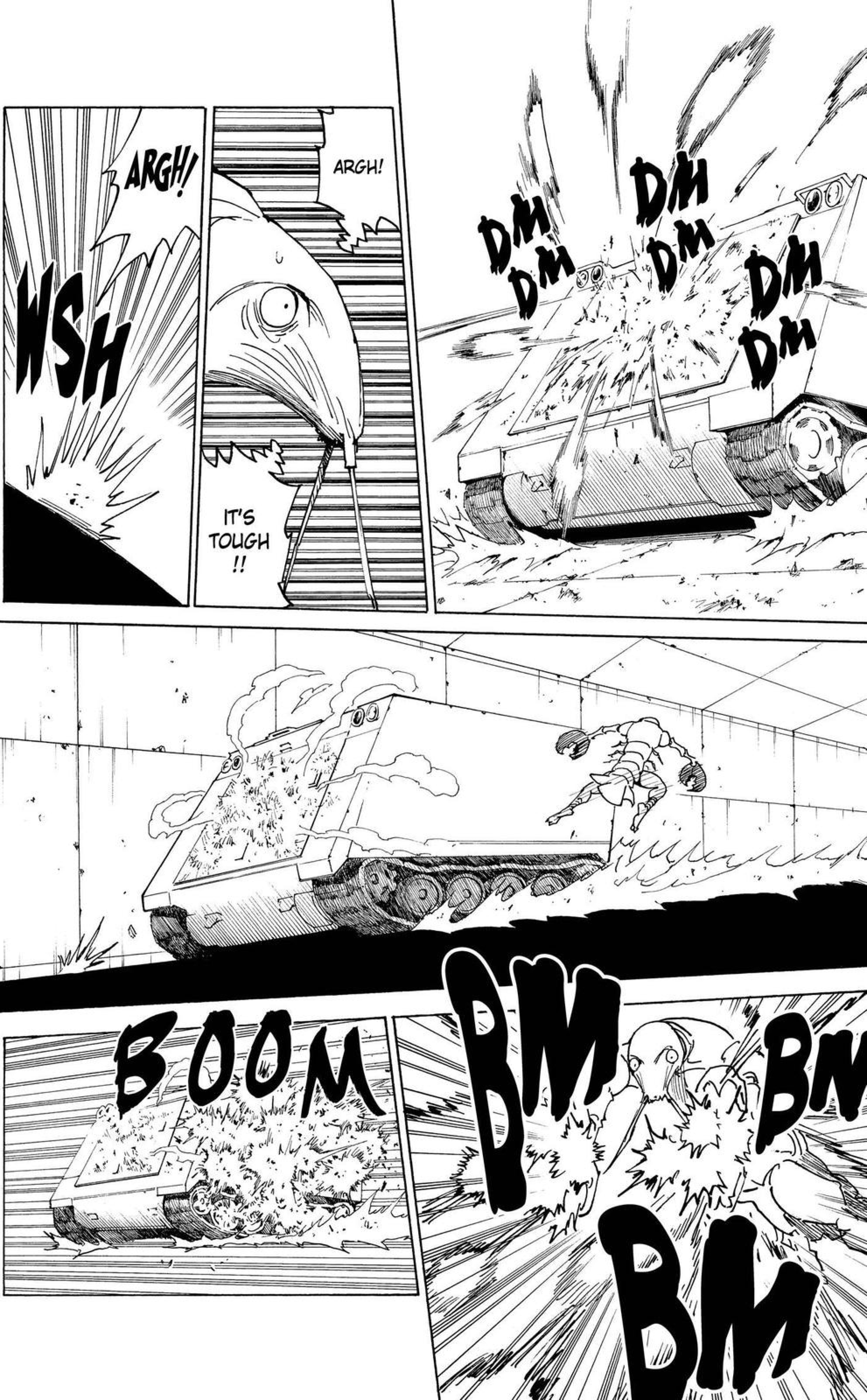

MAN...
THAT ONLY SCORCHED THE SURFACE.
I NEED A DIFFERENT PLAN.
WARE-HOUSES
GARAGE
MONITOR ROOM
ME
EV
SURFACE
THE BULKHEAD CONTROLS ARE IN THE MONITOR ROOM. IF I CAN GET THERE, I CAN OPEN THE BULKHEADS!!
WAIT...WHAT ABOUT THE BULKHEAD TO THE MONITOR ROOM?
GREAT IDEA!!
ARGH... I STILL HAVE TO DESTROY THIS ONE...
...OR THERE'S NO WAY TO THE SURFACE...
WAIT A SEC...
MAYBE THERE'S A WAY!!
A WAY OUT...
FSSH
FSSH
...WITHOUT DESTROYING A BULKHEAD!!!
!!
RRMM
WHAT NOW?
IT'S OPENING...

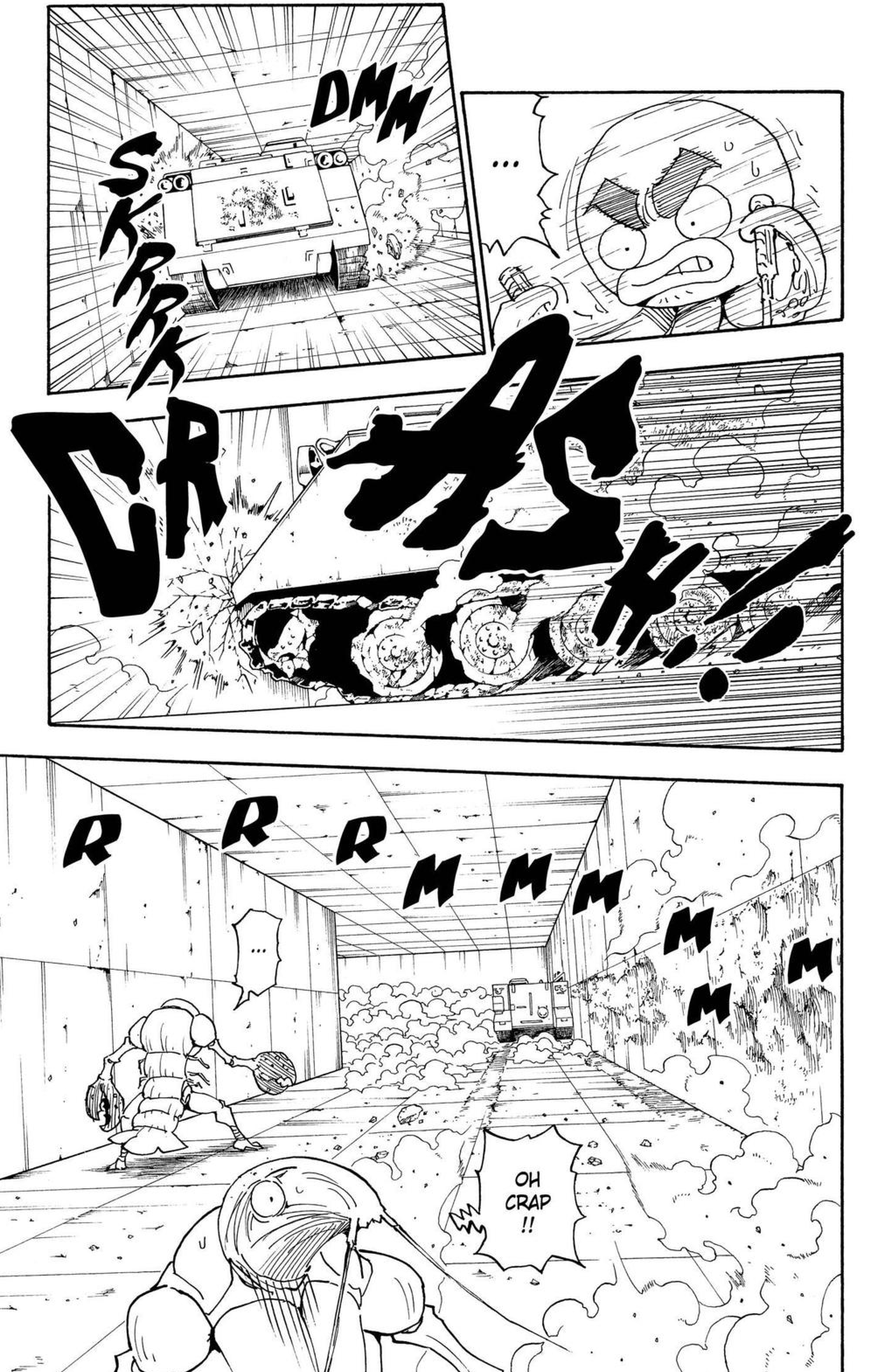

RRRRMMMM
SKEEK
SKEEK
SKEEK
HMPH ...
A TANK !!
JUST LIKE THE CHICKEN YOU ARE.
BUT...
...THE BULKHEAD BEHIND IT IS CLOSED!
THE MONITOR ROOM LIES BEYOND.
SO THAT MEANS ...
...HE CLOSED THE NEARER BULKHEAD AND DROVE THE TANK IN...
...THEN WENT BACK TO THE MONITOR ROOM, WHERE HE PRESSED BOTH BUTTONS TO RAISE THAT BULKHEAD AND CLOSE THE FURTHER ONE AT THE SAME TIME.
①
THEN HE RAN TO THE TANK! THAT MEANS *HE* CAN'T GET OUT EITHER!
EV

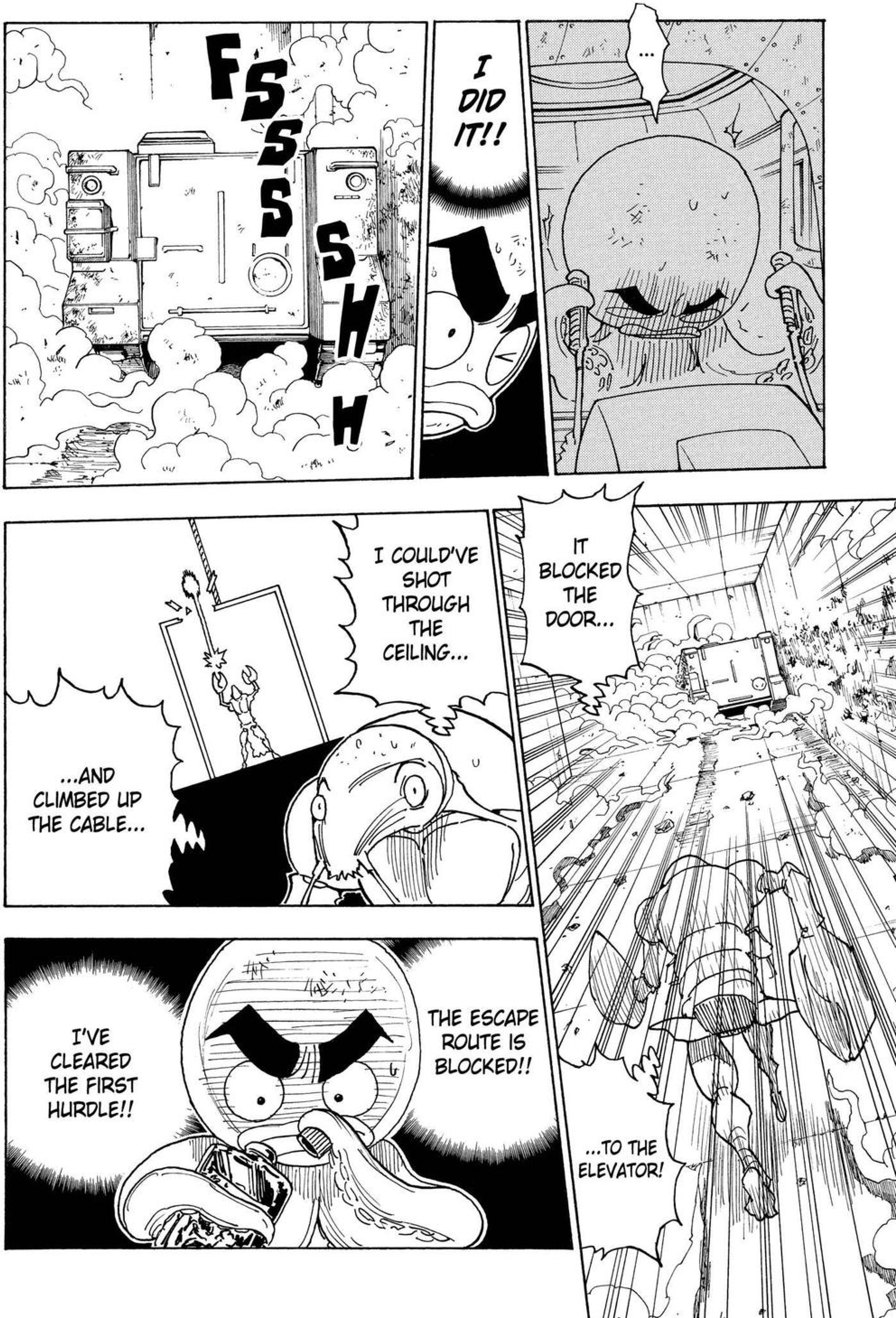

HE BLOCKED HIS LINE OF RETREAT...
...TO FORCE A SHOW-DOWN!!
SO THERE WERE AT LEAST THREE OF YOU.
YEAH, RIGHT. LIKE HE'D BE THAT BRAVE!! HEH HEH...
THE OTHER ONE'S WATCHING IN THE MONITOR ROOM, I BET.
THAT PISSES ME OFF.
JUST YOU WATCH, YOU PEEPING TOM!!
I'LL DRAG YOUR FRIEND OUTTA THE TANK AND RIP HIM TO PIECES!!!
I HAVE TO DEAL WITH THIS!!
THIS TIME I HAVE TO DO IT MYSELF!!!

Chapter 283: Determination

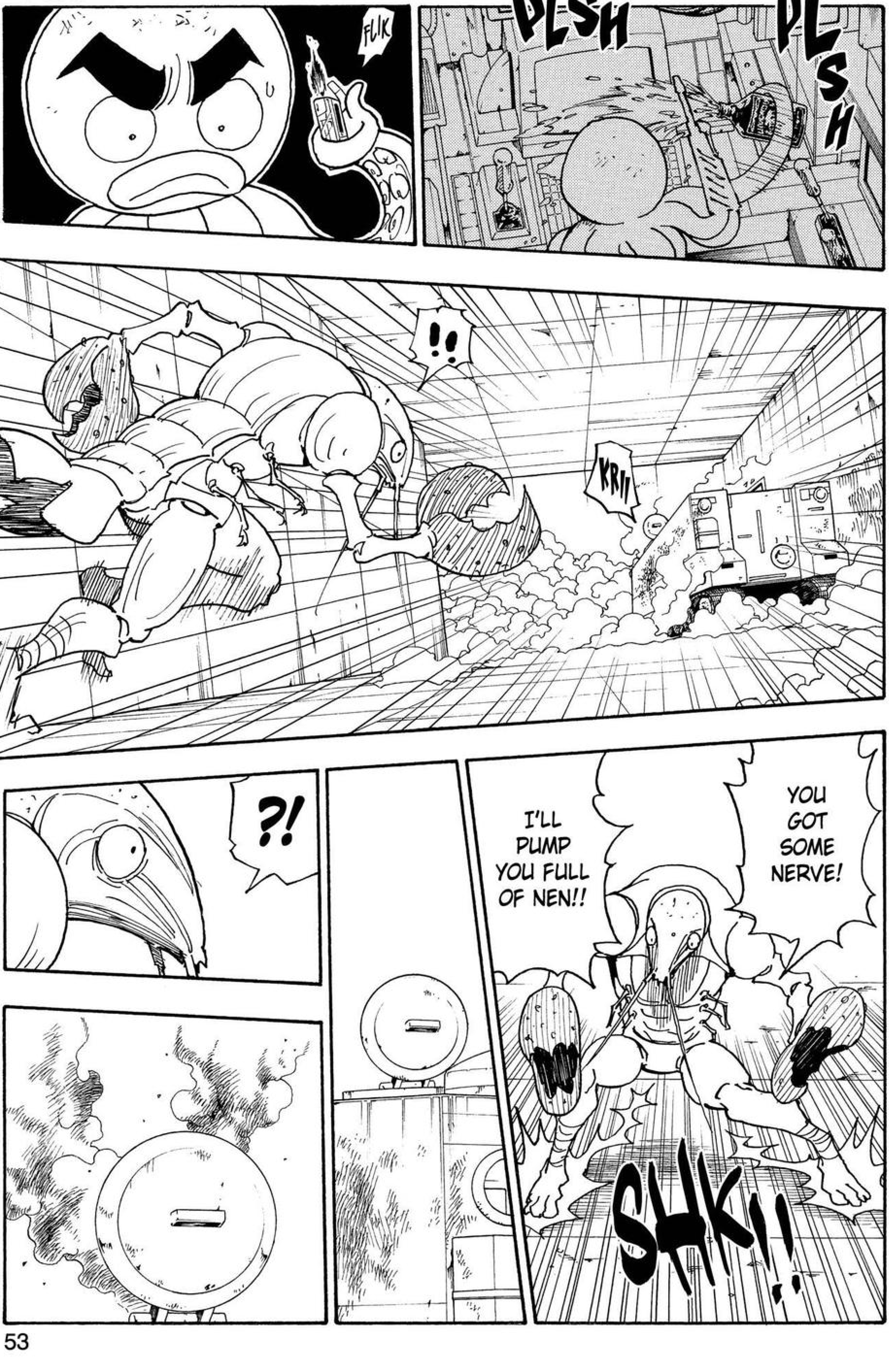

RRRMMMMM
SKEECH
!!
GRRRM
BLAM BLAM BLAM

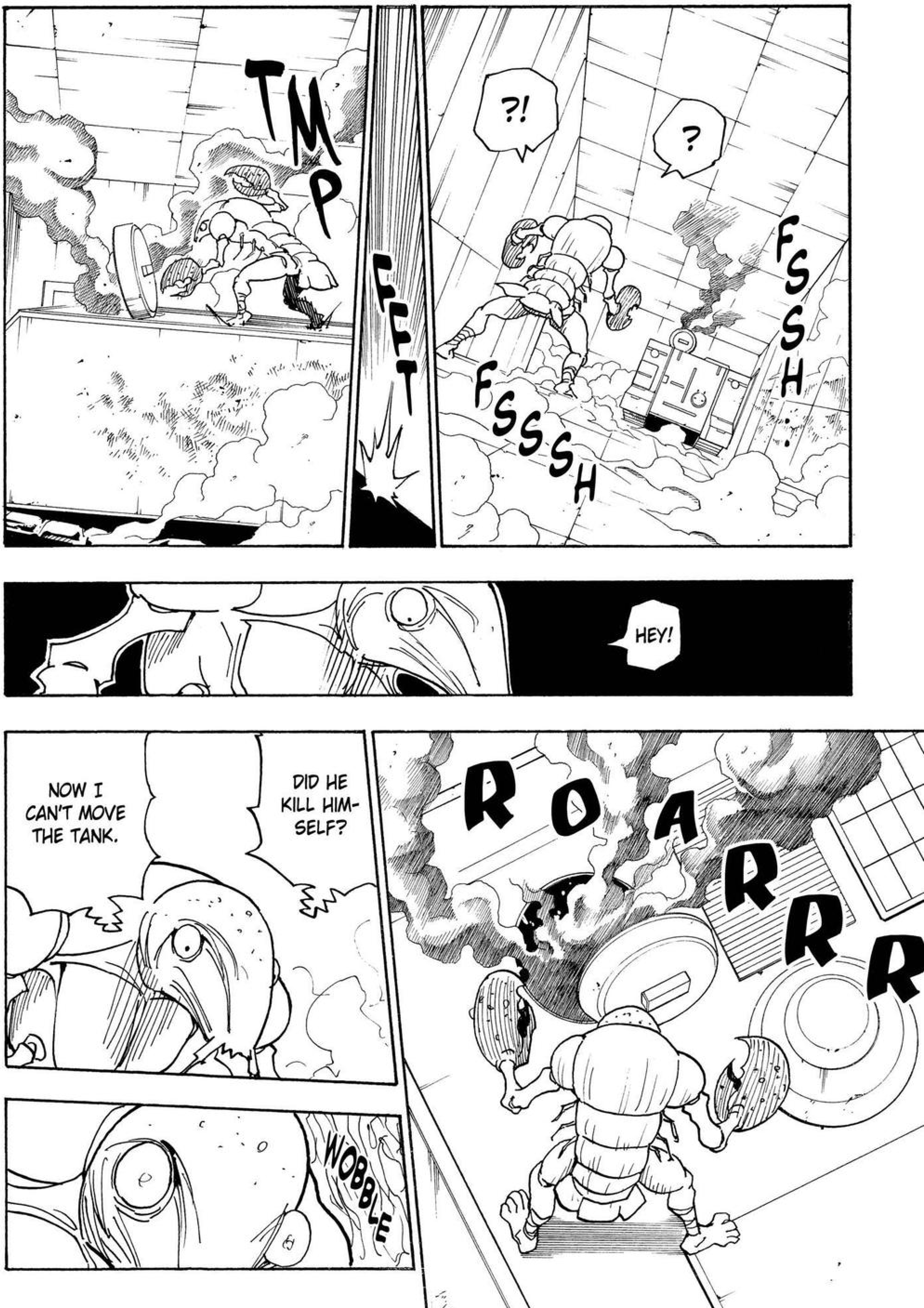

DM DM
DM DM
DM DM
ARGH!
IT'S TOUGH !!
ARGH!
WSH
BM
BM
BM
BOOM


...
DMM
SKRRK
CRASH!!
RRRMMMMMMMM
...
OH CRAP !!

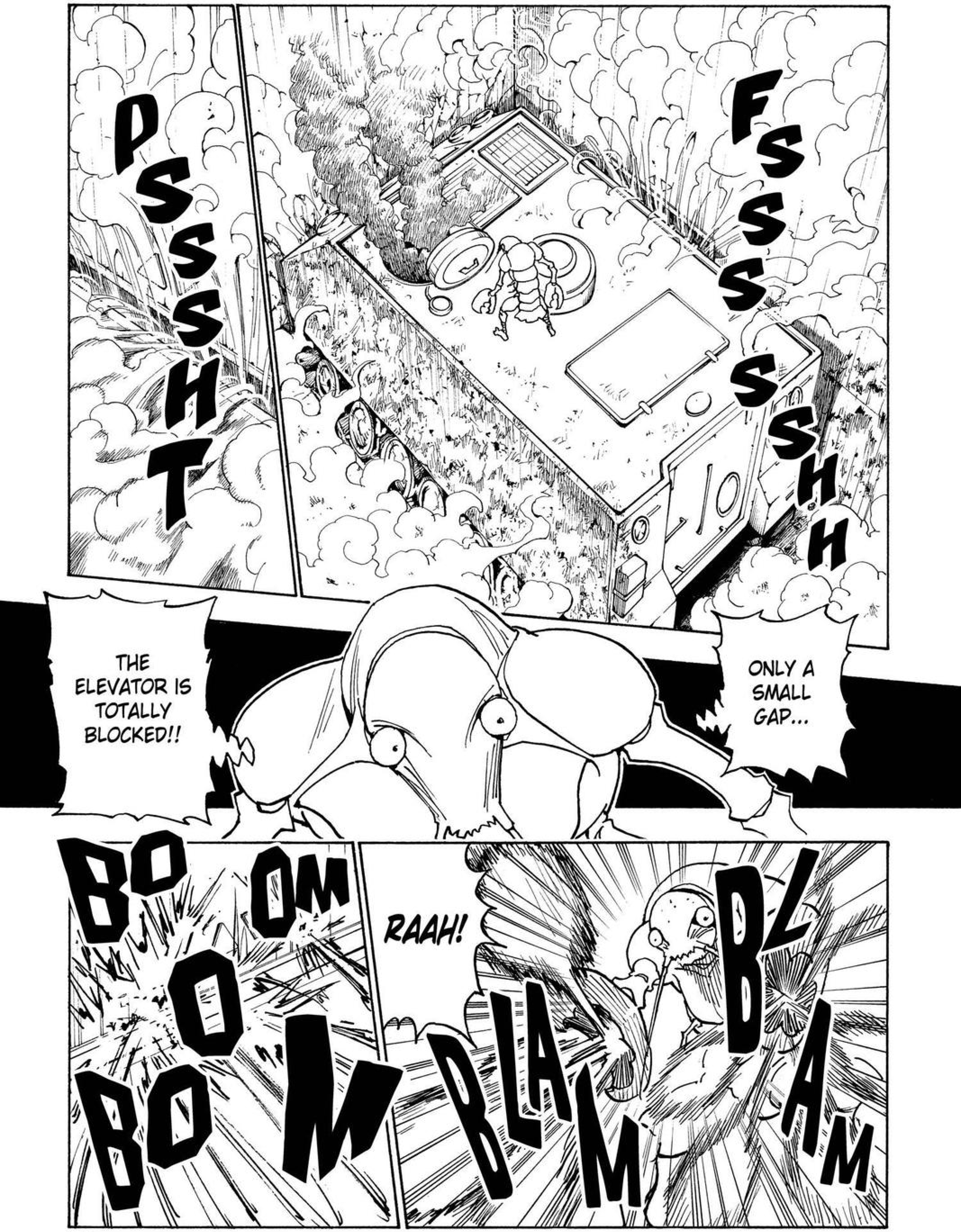

...
I DID IT!!
FSSSSHH
IT BLOCKED THE DOOR...
...TO THE ELEVATOR!
I COULD'VE SHOT THROUGH THE CEILING...
...AND CLIMBED UP THE CABLE...
THE ESCAPE ROUTE IS BLOCKED!!
I'VE CLEARED THE FIRST HURDLE!!

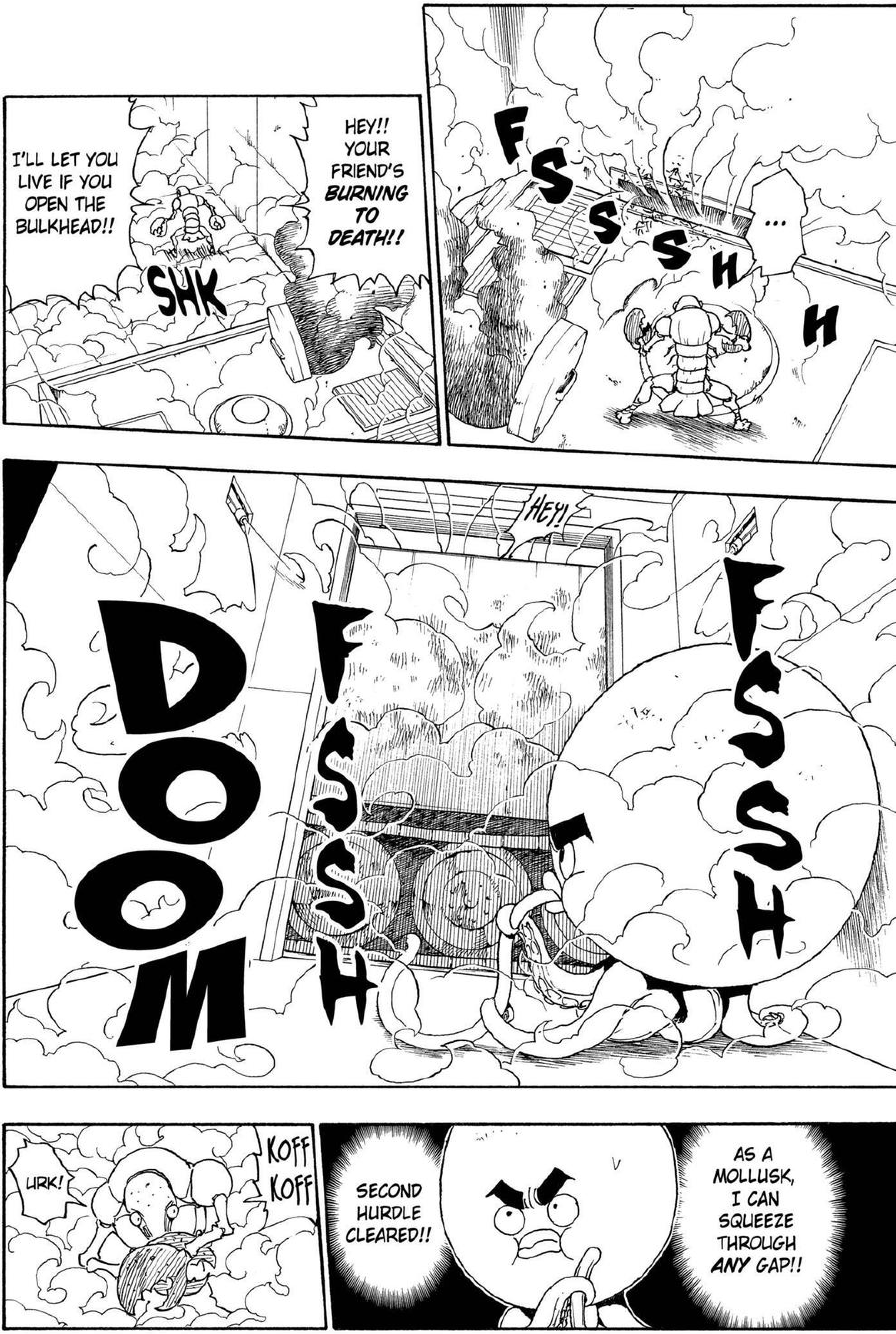
READ THIS WAY

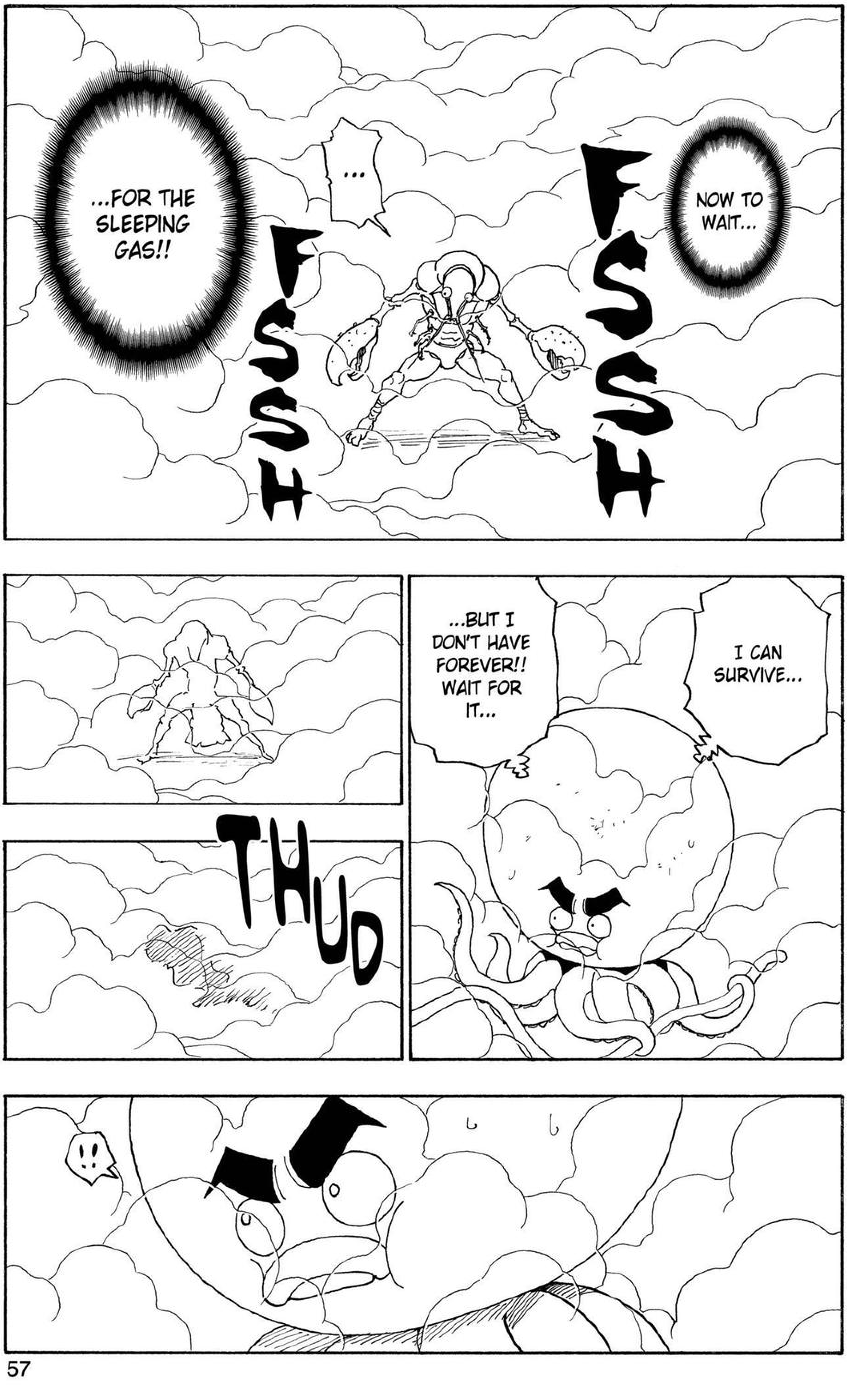

PLSH
PLSH
FLIK
!!
KRII
YOU GOT SOME NERVE!
I'LL PUMP YOU FULL OF NEN!!
SHK!!
?!

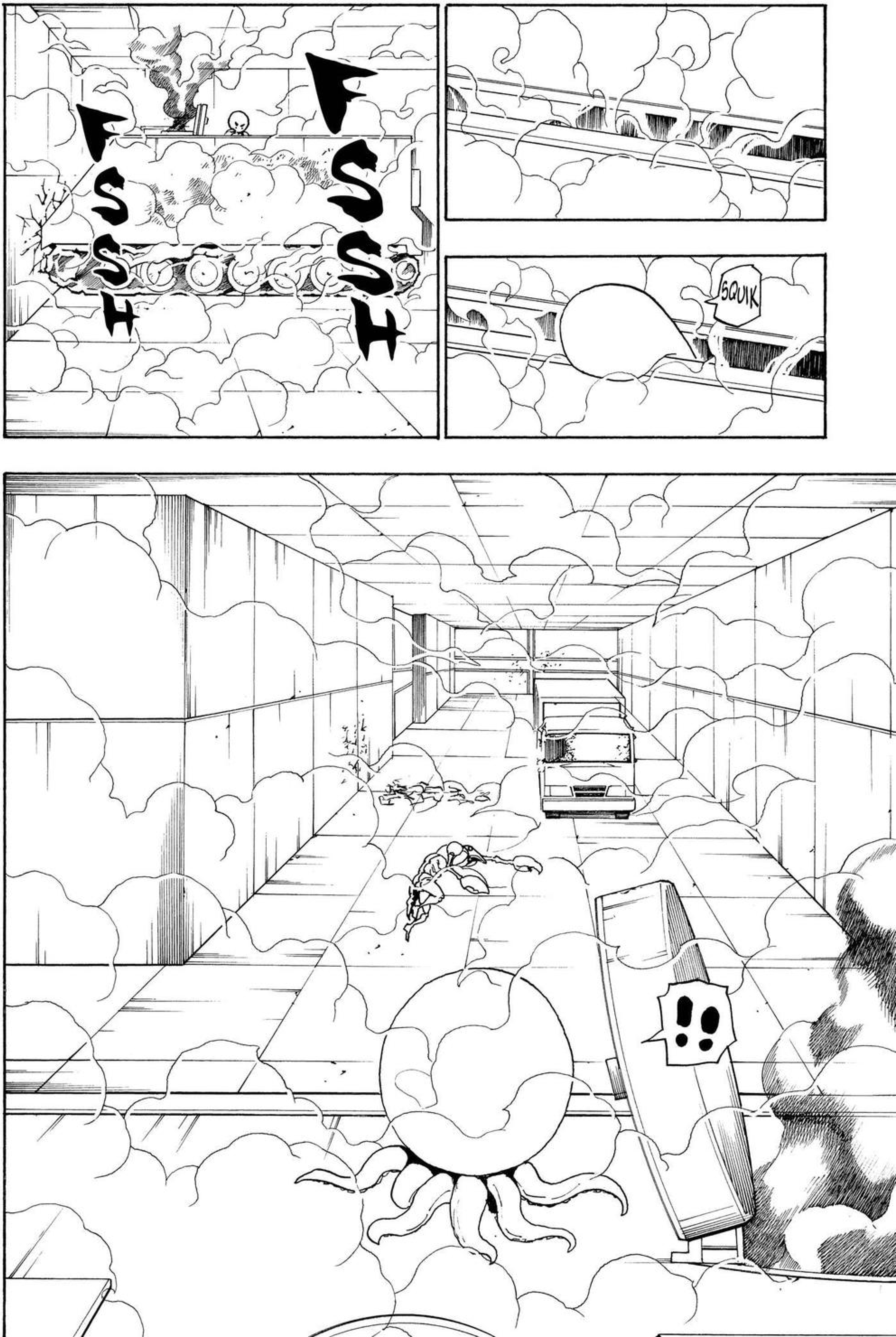

TMP
FFFT
?!
?
FSSSH..
FSSSSH
HEY!
NOW I CAN'T MOVE THE TANK.
DID HE KILL HIMSELF?
WOBBLE
ROARRRR

READ THIS WAY

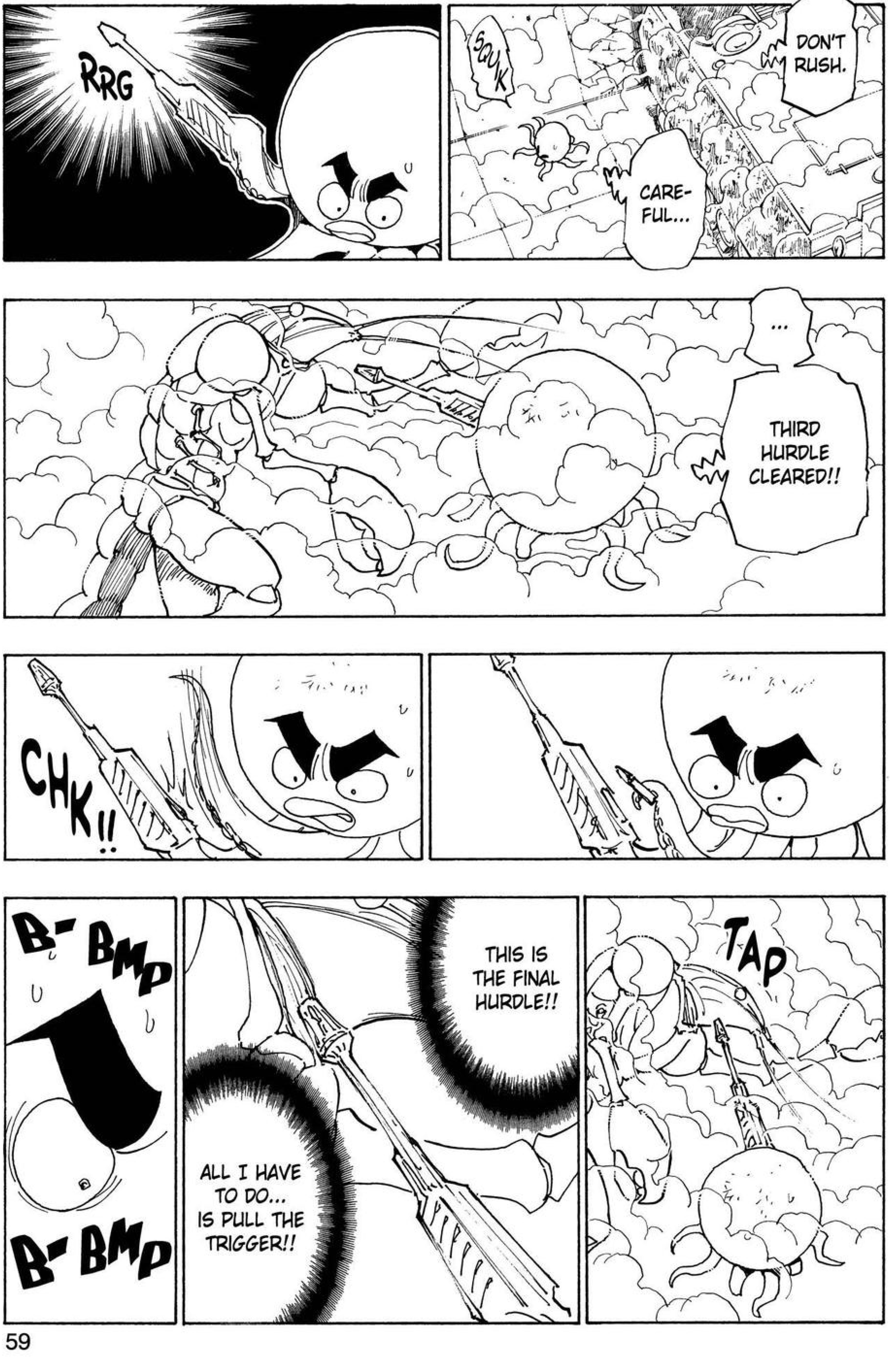

FSSSSSHH
PSSSHT
ONLY A SMALL GAP...
THE ELEVATOR IS TOTALLY BLOCKED!!
BLAM
BLAM
RAAH!
BOOOM
BOOM

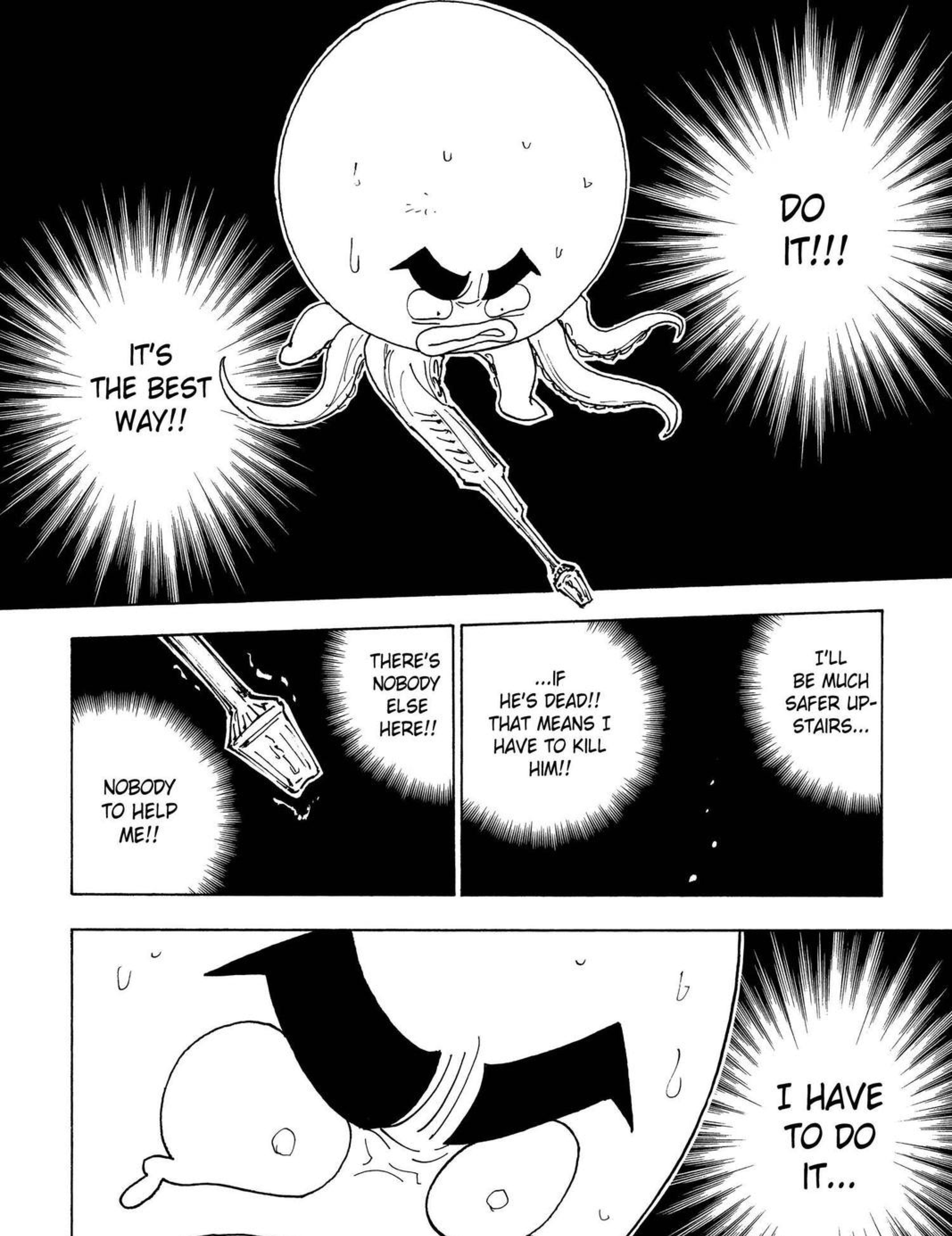

FSSSHH
...
HEY!! YOUR FRIEND'S *BURNING* TO *DEATH!!*
I'LL LET YOU LIVE IF YOU OPEN THE BULKHEAD!!
SHK
HEY!
FSSH
FSSH
DOOM
AS A MOLLUSK, I CAN SQUEEZE THROUGH *ANY* GAP!!
SECOND HURDLE CLEARED!!
KOFF KOFF
URK!

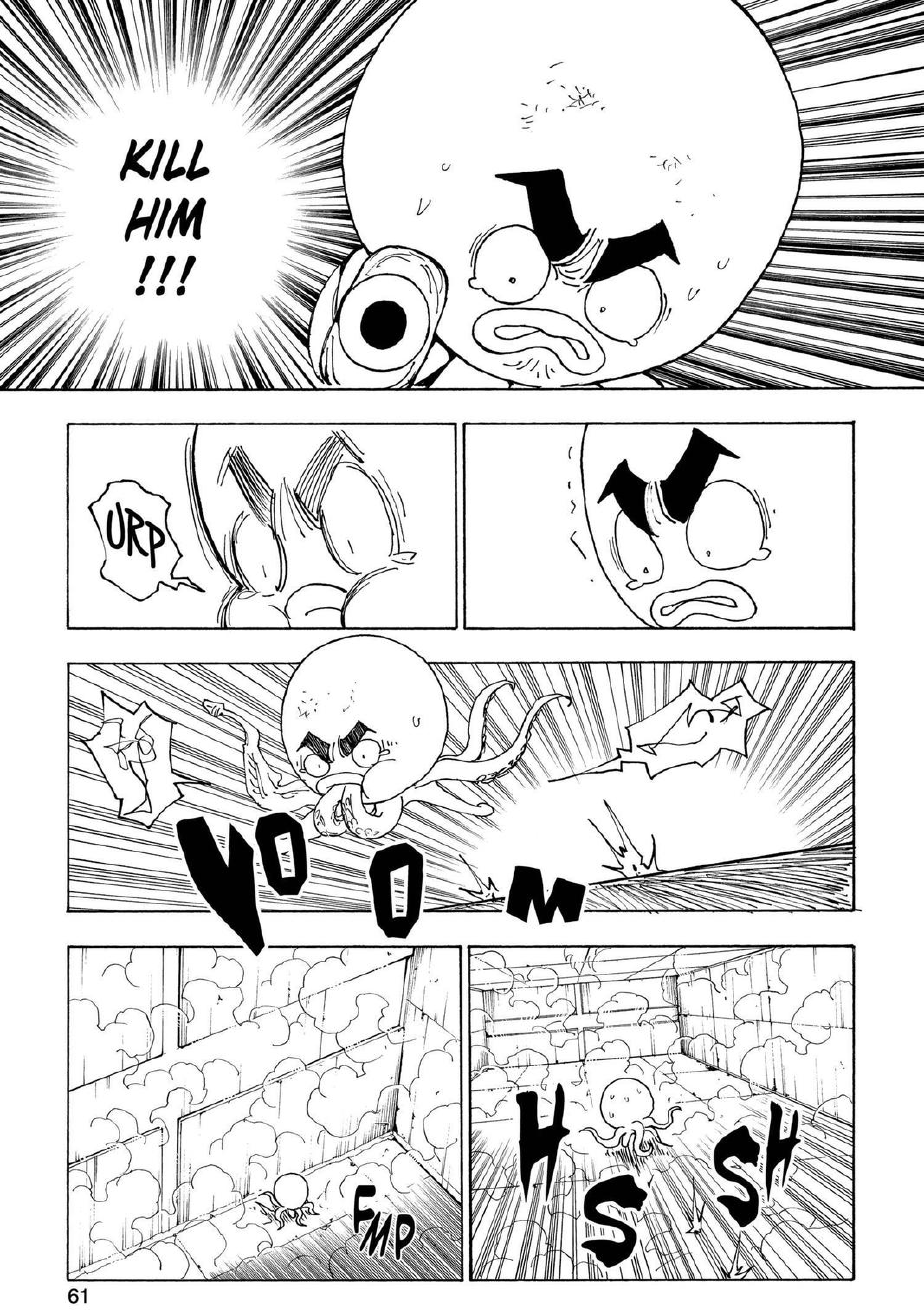

NOW TO WAIT...
FSSH
...
FSSH
...FOR THE SLEEPING GAS!!
I CAN SURVIVE...
...BUT I DON'T HAVE FOREVER!! WAIT FOR IT...
THUD
!!

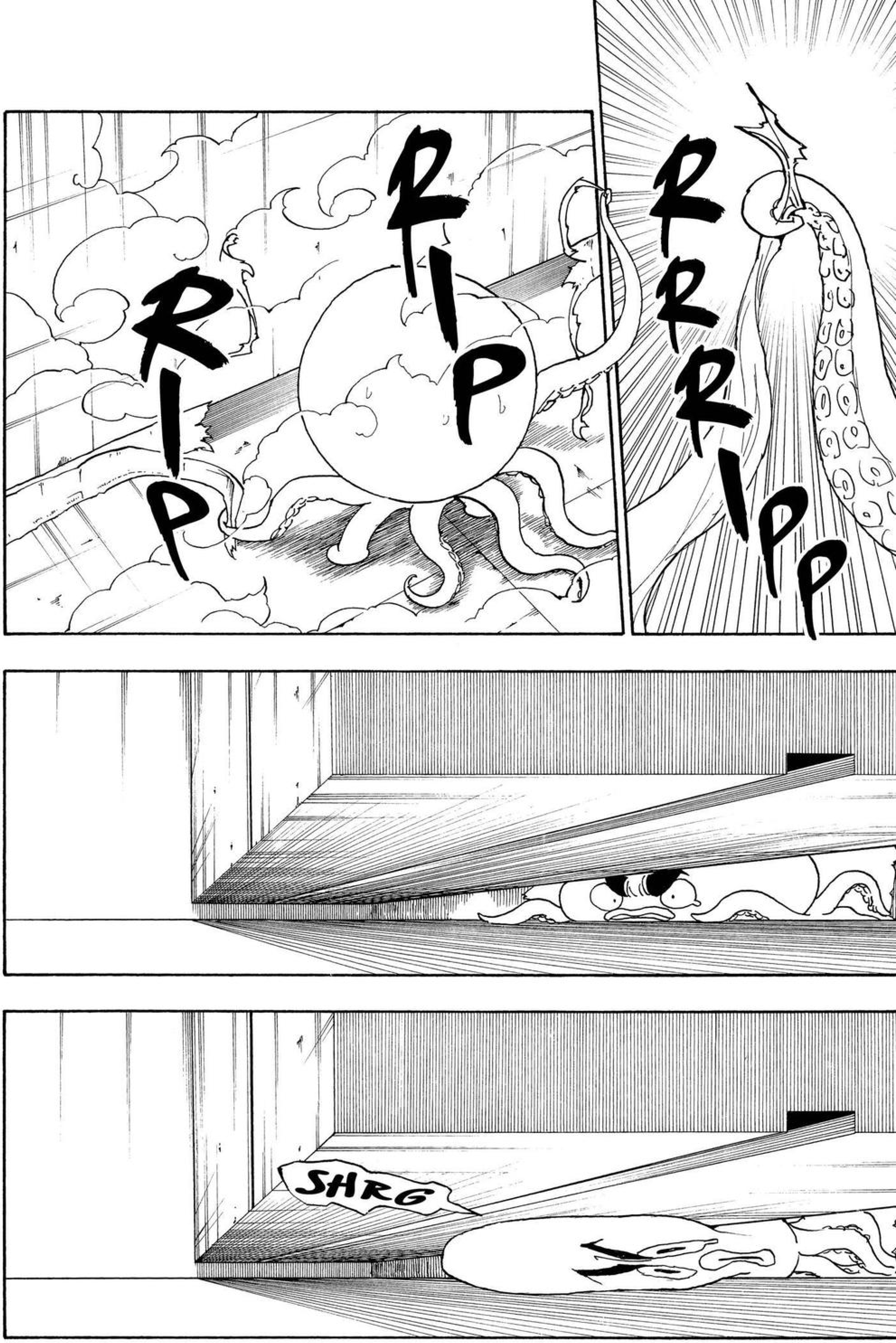

FSSH
FSSH
SQUIK
!!

READ THIS WAY

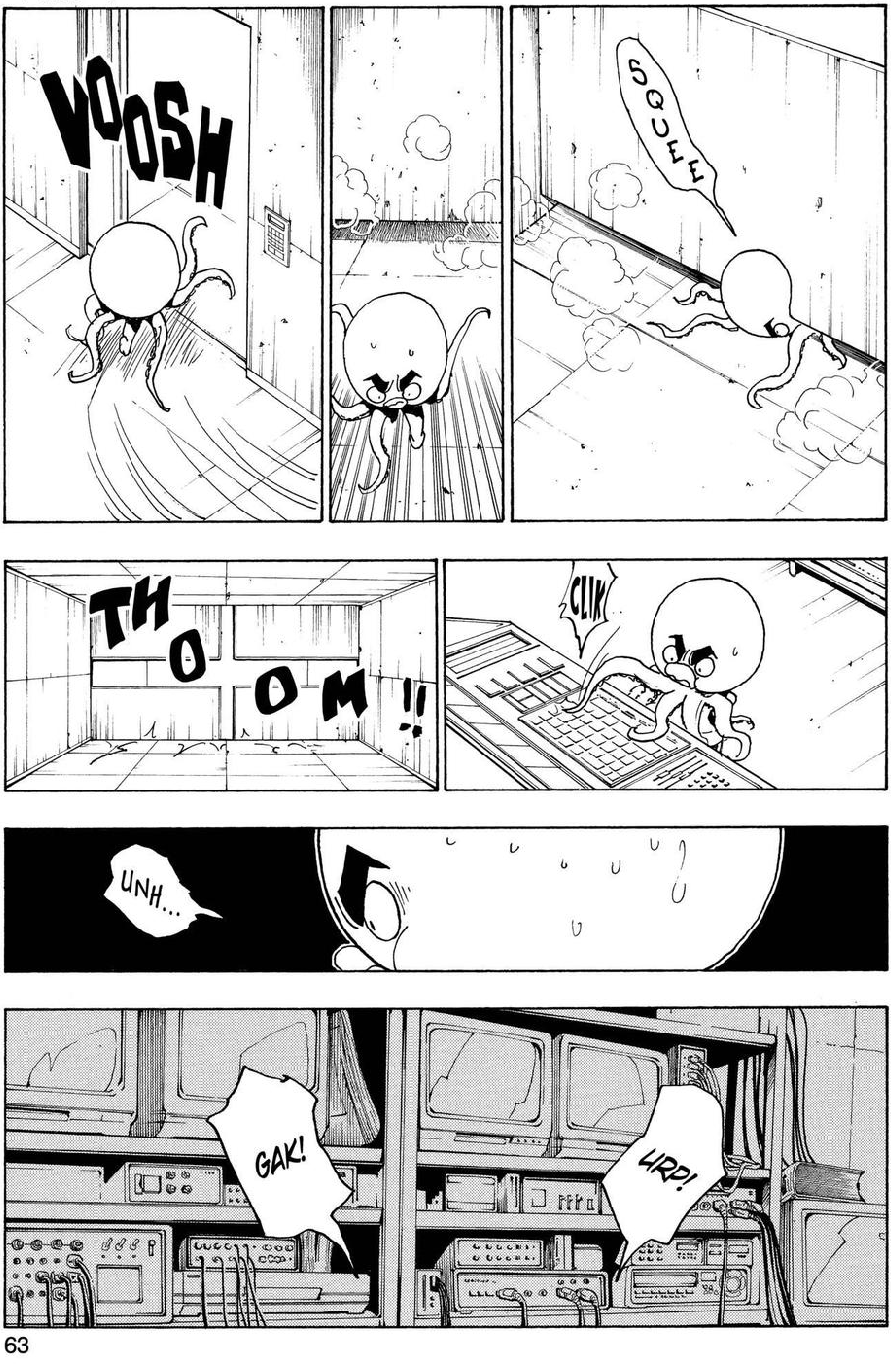

DON'T RUSH.
CARE-FUL...
SQUIK
RRG
...
THIRD HURDLE CLEARED!!
CHK!!
TAP
THIS IS THE FINAL HURDLE!!
ALL I HAVE TO DO... IS PULL THE TRIGGER!!
B-BMP
B-BMP

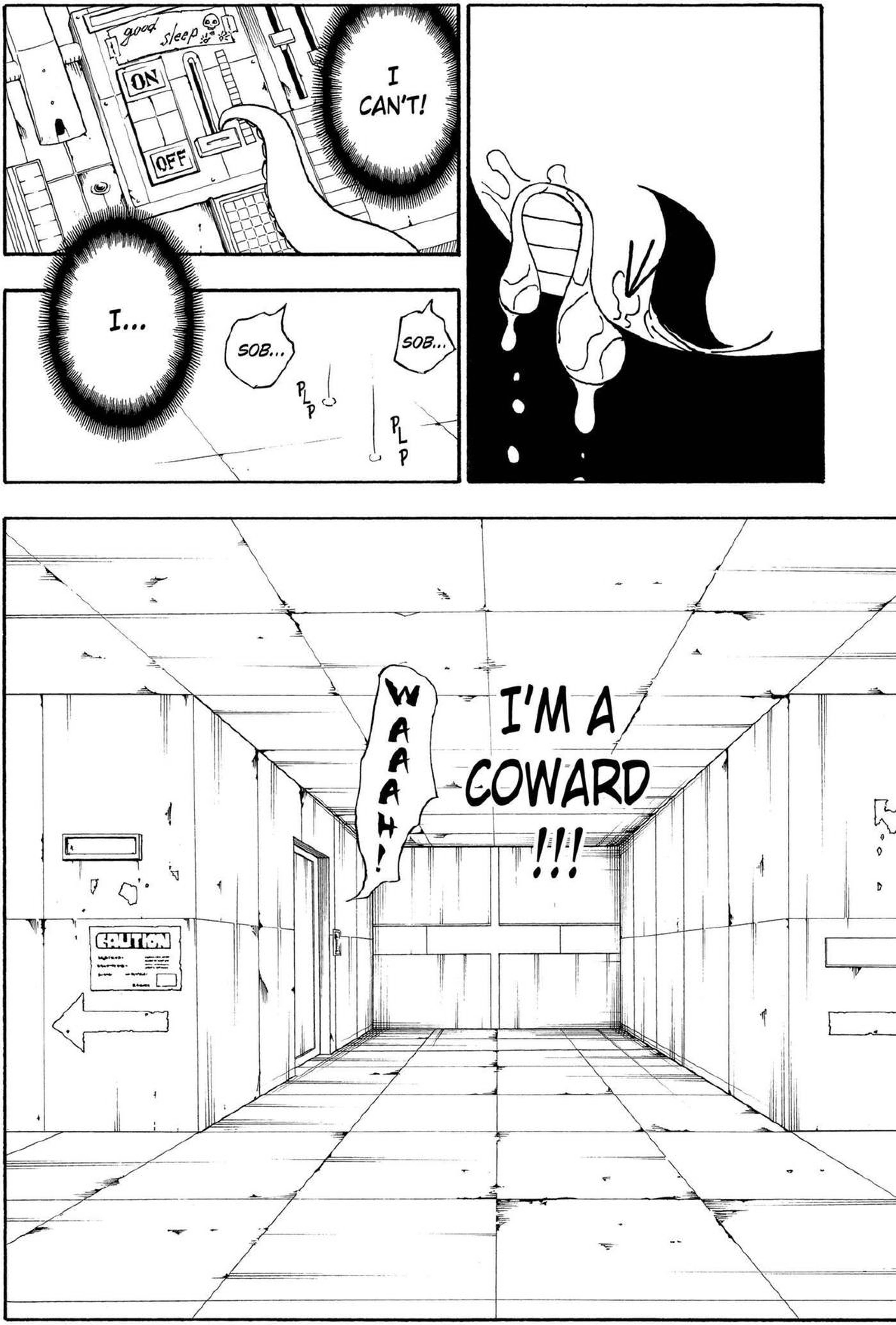

DO IT!!!
IT'S THE BEST WAY!!
I'LL BE MUCH SAFER UPSTAIRS...
...IF HE'S DEAD!! THAT MEANS I HAVE TO KILL HIM!!
THERE'S NOBODY ELSE HERE!!
NOBODY TO HELP ME!!
I HAVE TO DO IT...

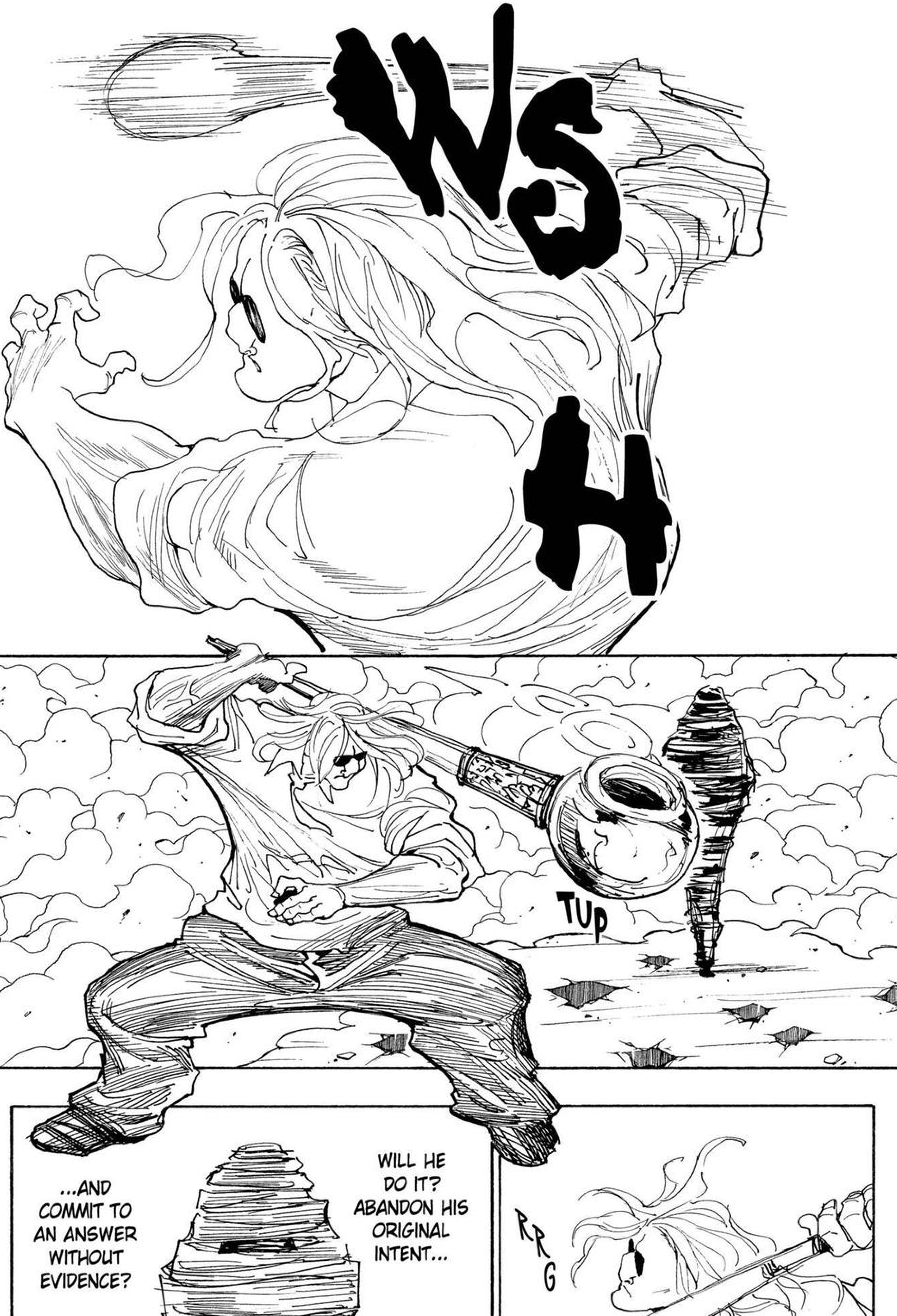

KILL HIM !!!
URP
VOOM
HSSSH
FMP

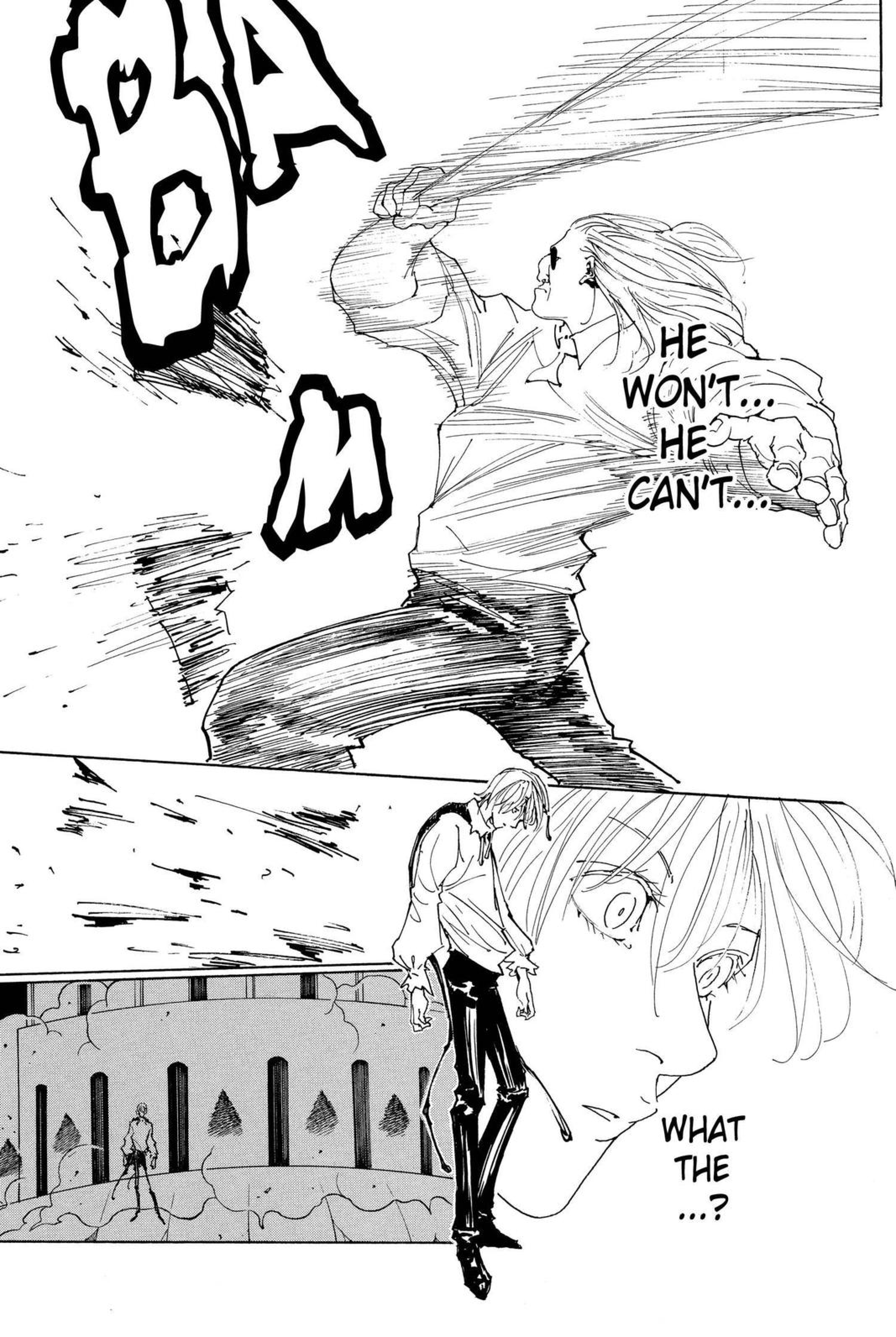

RRRIPP
RIP
RIP
SHRG

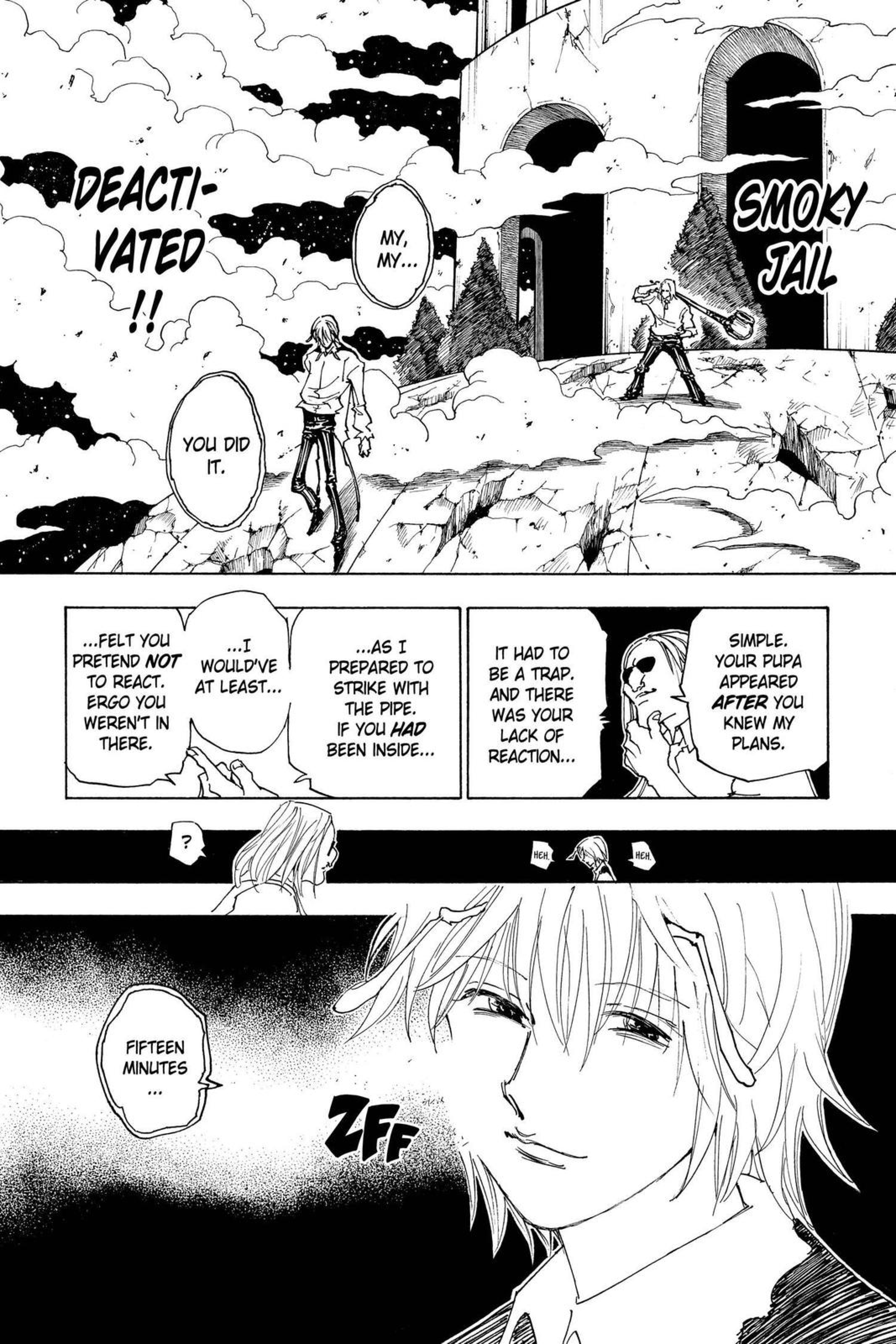
READ THIS WAY

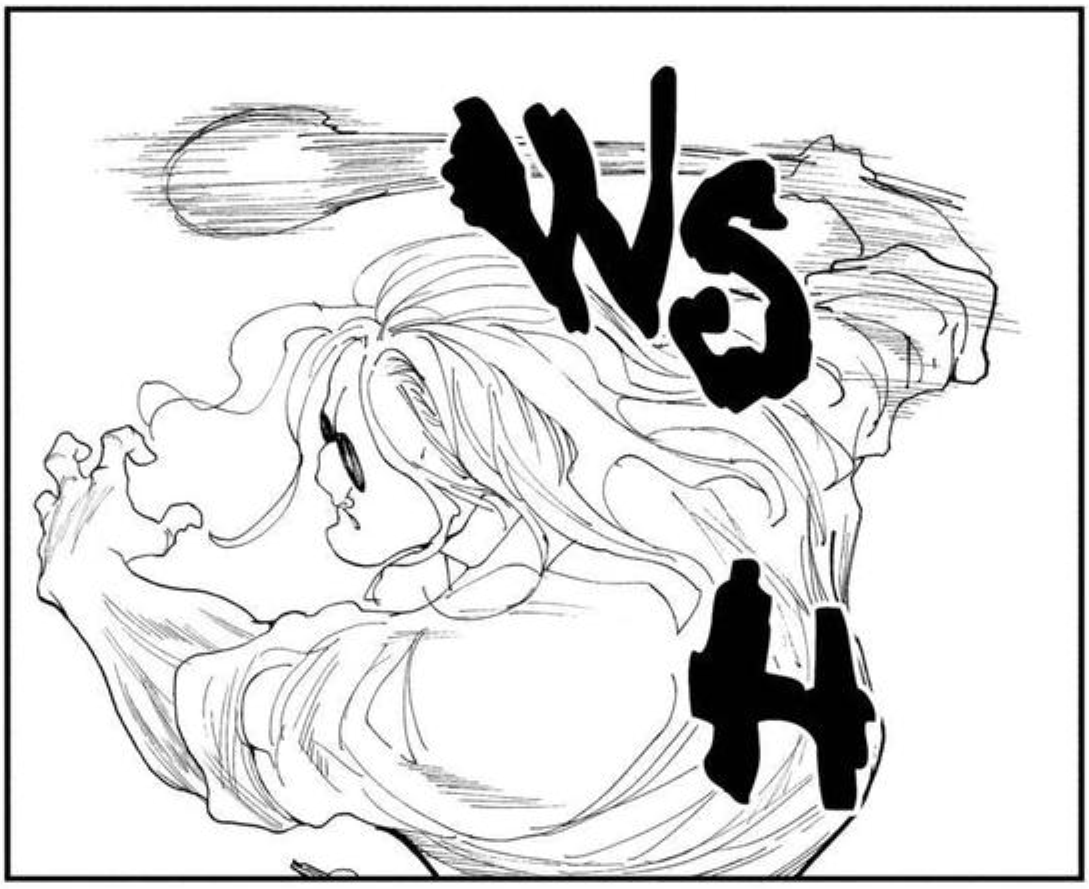

SQUEE
VOOSH
CLIK
THOOOM!!
UNH...
URP!
GAK!


good sleep
ON
OFF
I CAN'T!
I...
SOB...
SOB...
PLP
PLP
I'M A COWARD!!!
WAAAH!
CAUTION

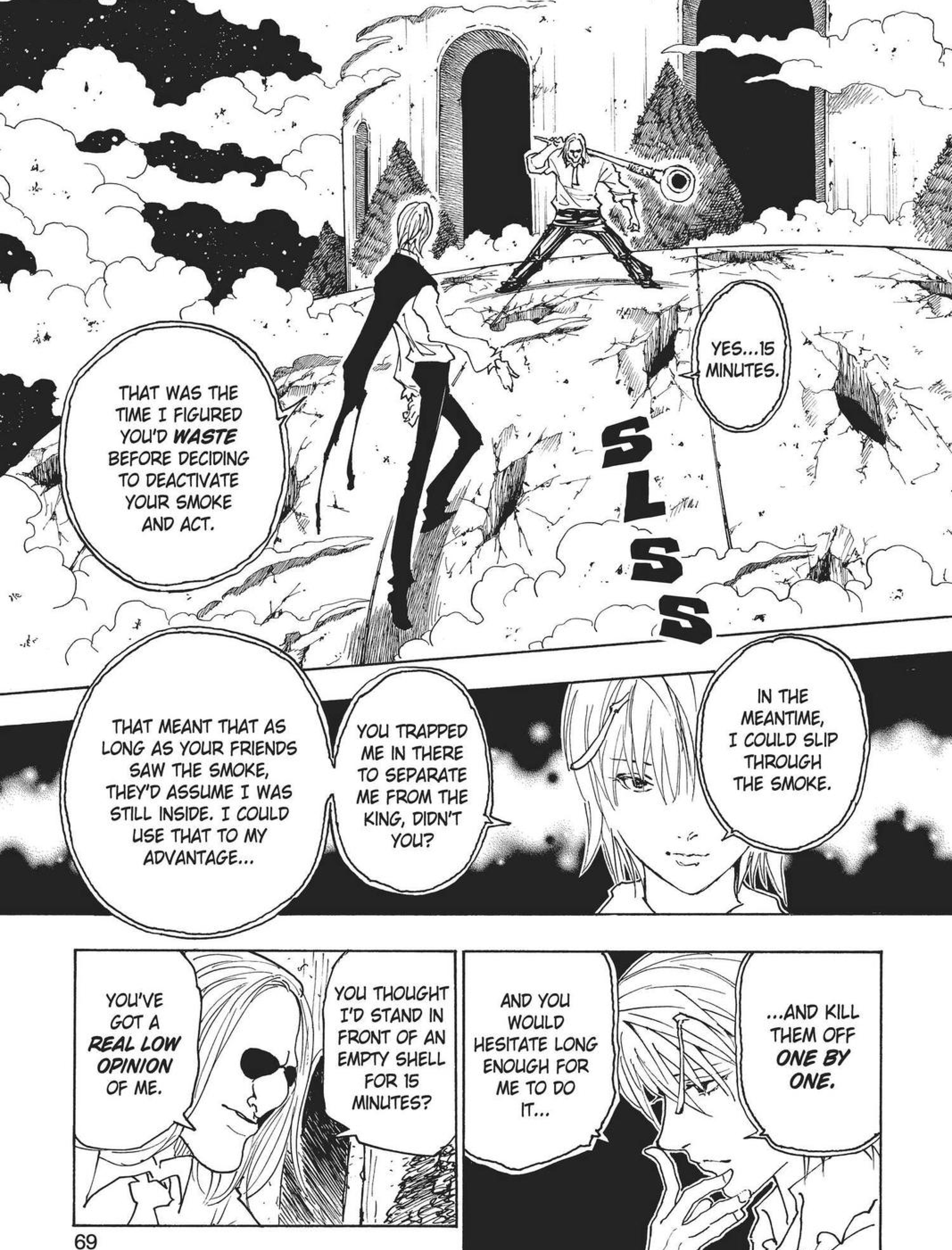

WSH
TUP
RRG
WILL HE DO IT? ABANDON HIS ORIGINAL INTENT...
...AND COMMIT TO AN ANSWER WITHOUT EVIDENCE?

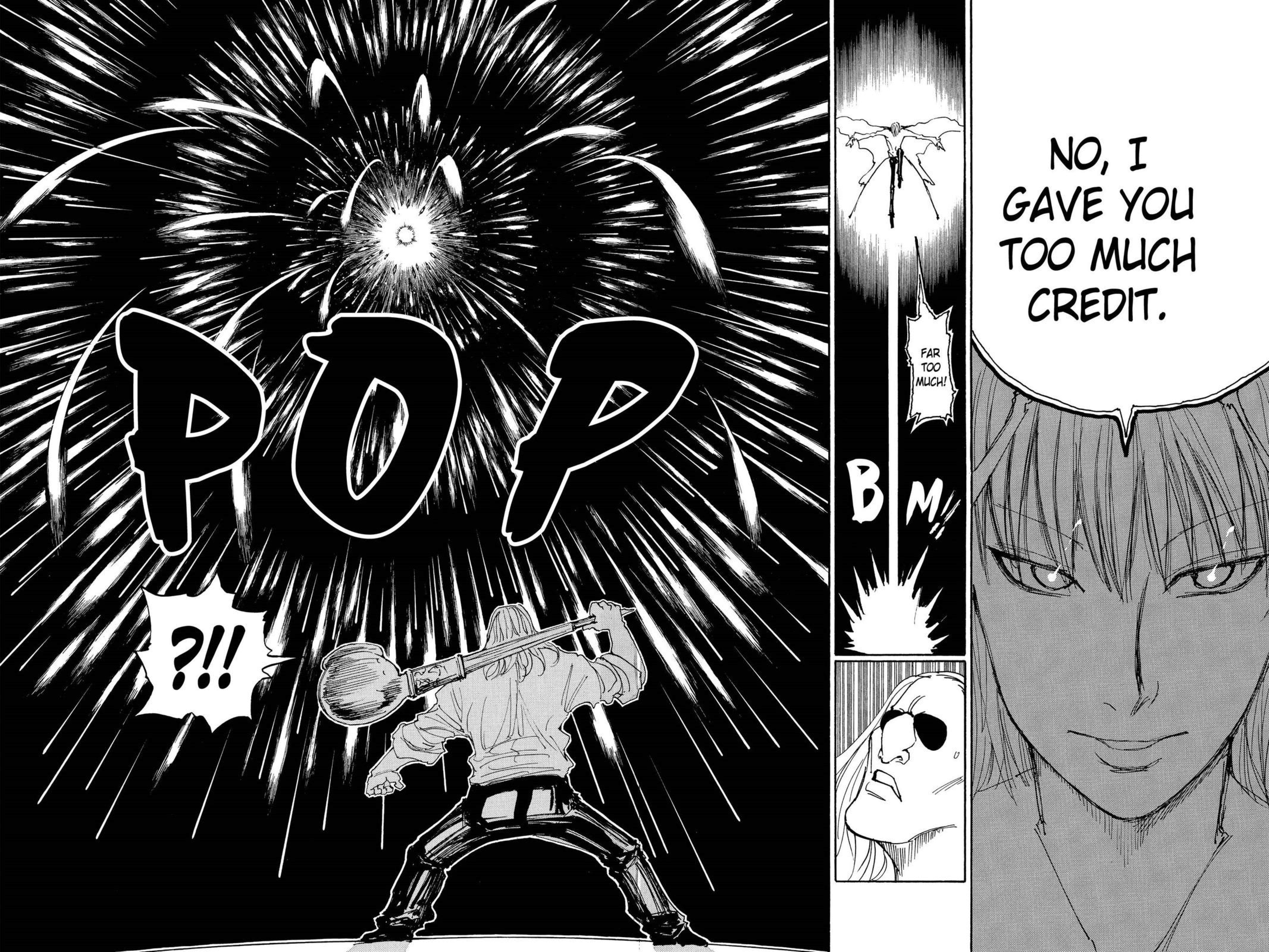

HE WON'T... HE CAN'T...
BAM
WHAT THE ...?

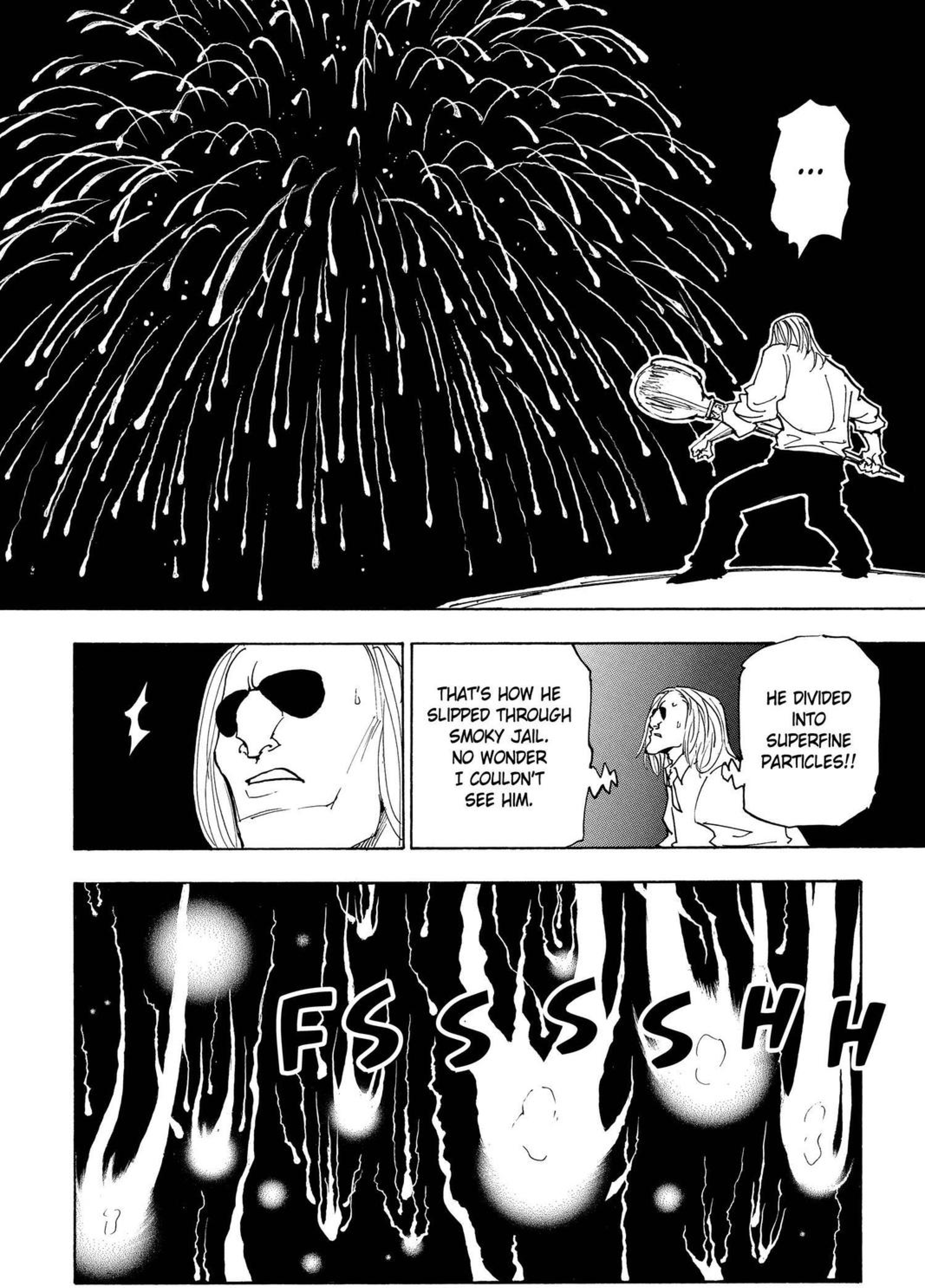

SMOKY JAIL
DEACTIVATED!!
MY, MY...
YOU DID IT.
SIMPLE. YOUR PUPA APPEARED **AFTER** YOU KNEW MY PLANS.
IT HAD TO BE A TRAP. AND THERE WAS YOUR LACK OF REACTION...
...AS I PREPARED TO STRIKE WITH THE PIPE. IF YOU **HAD** BEEN INSIDE...
...I WOULD'VE AT LEAST...
...FELT YOU PRETEND **NOT** TO REACT. ERGO YOU WEREN'T IN THERE.
HEH.
HEH.
?
ZFF
FIFTEEN MINUTES...

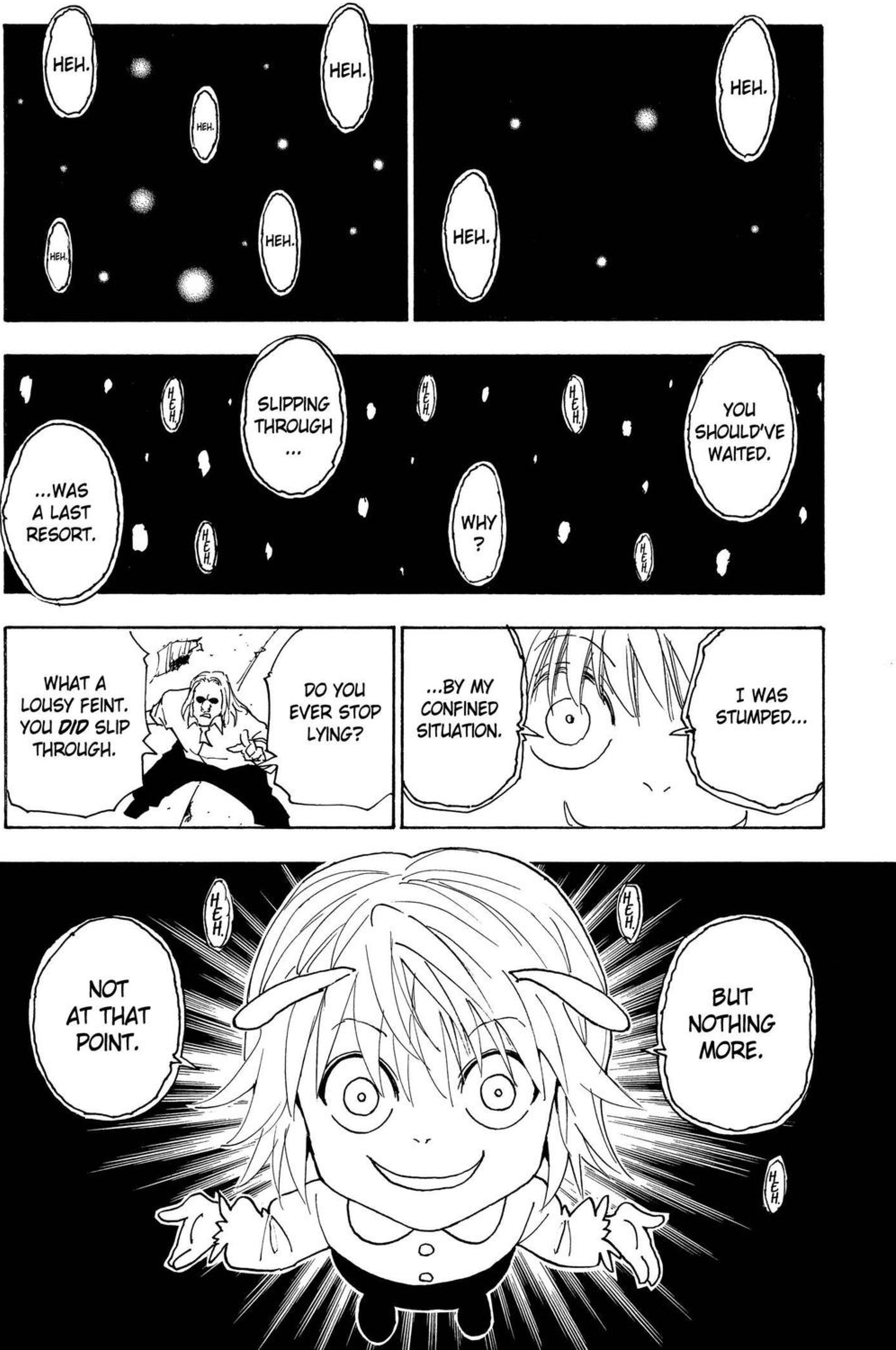

WSH

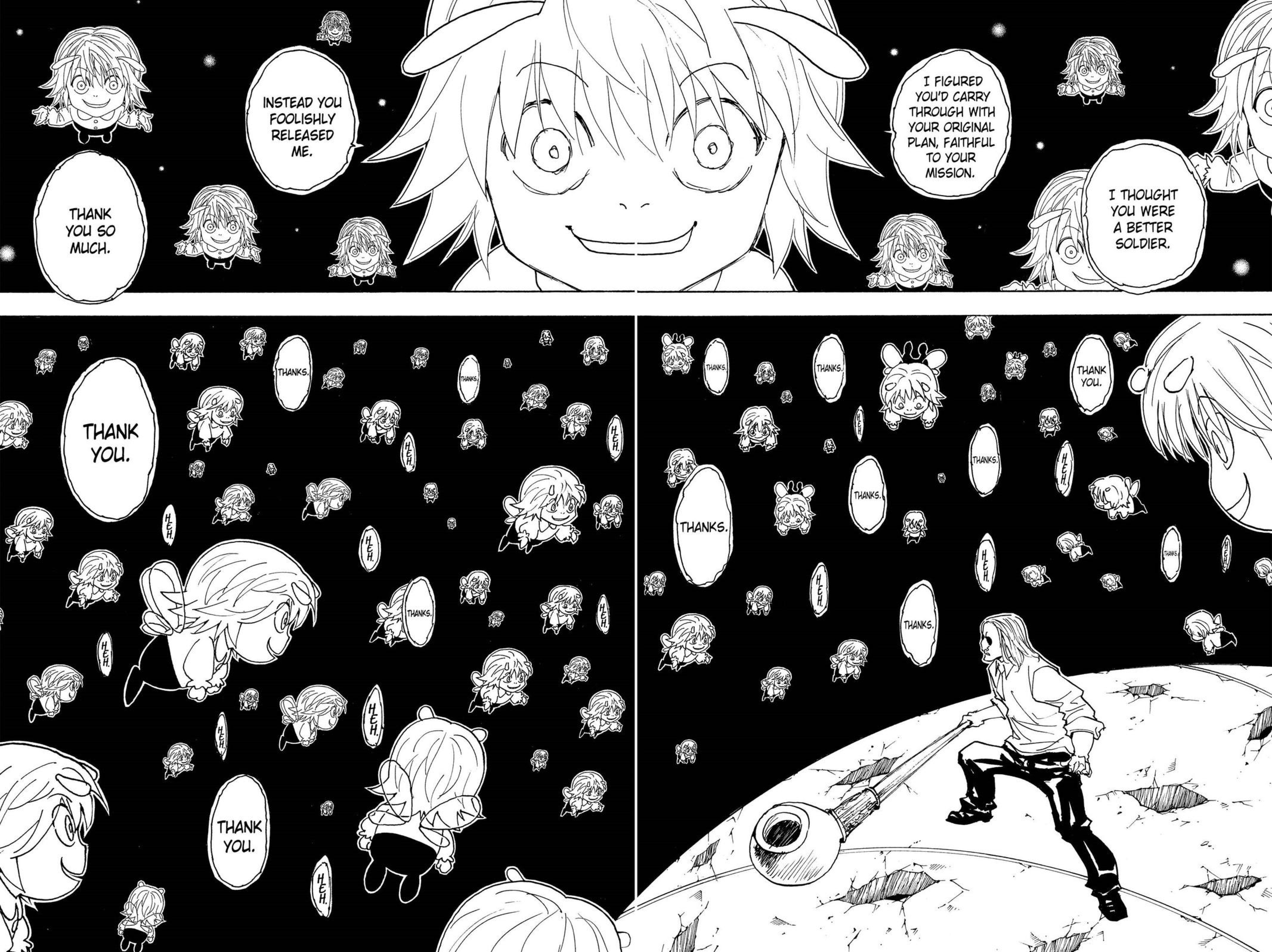
Chapter 284: Fifteen Minutes

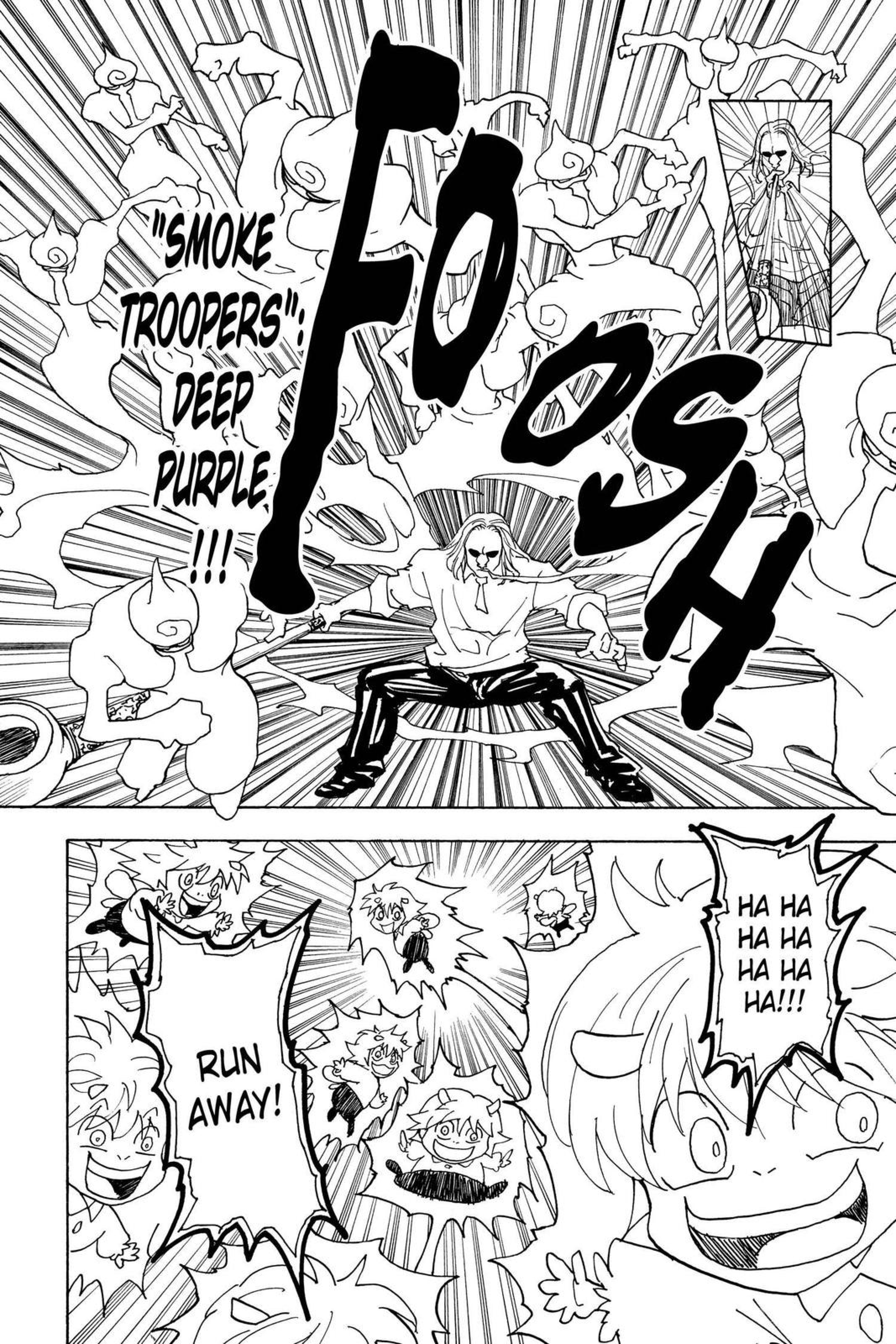

YES...15 MINUTES.
THAT WAS THE TIME I FIGURED YOU'D ***WASTE*** BEFORE DECIDING TO DEACTIVATE YOUR SMOKE AND ACT.
SLSS
IN THE MEANTIME, I COULD SLIP THROUGH THE SMOKE.
YOU TRAPPED ME IN THERE TO SEPARATE ME FROM THE KING, DIDN'T YOU?
THAT MEANT THAT AS LONG AS YOUR FRIENDS SAW THE SMOKE, THEY'D ASSUME I WAS STILL INSIDE. I COULD USE THAT TO MY ADVANTAGE...
...AND KILL THEM OFF ***ONE BY ONE.***
AND YOU WOULD HESITATE LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO DO IT...
YOU THOUGHT I'D STAND IN FRONT OF AN EMPTY SHELL FOR 15 MINUTES?
YOU'VE GOT A ***REAL LOW OPINION*** OF ME.

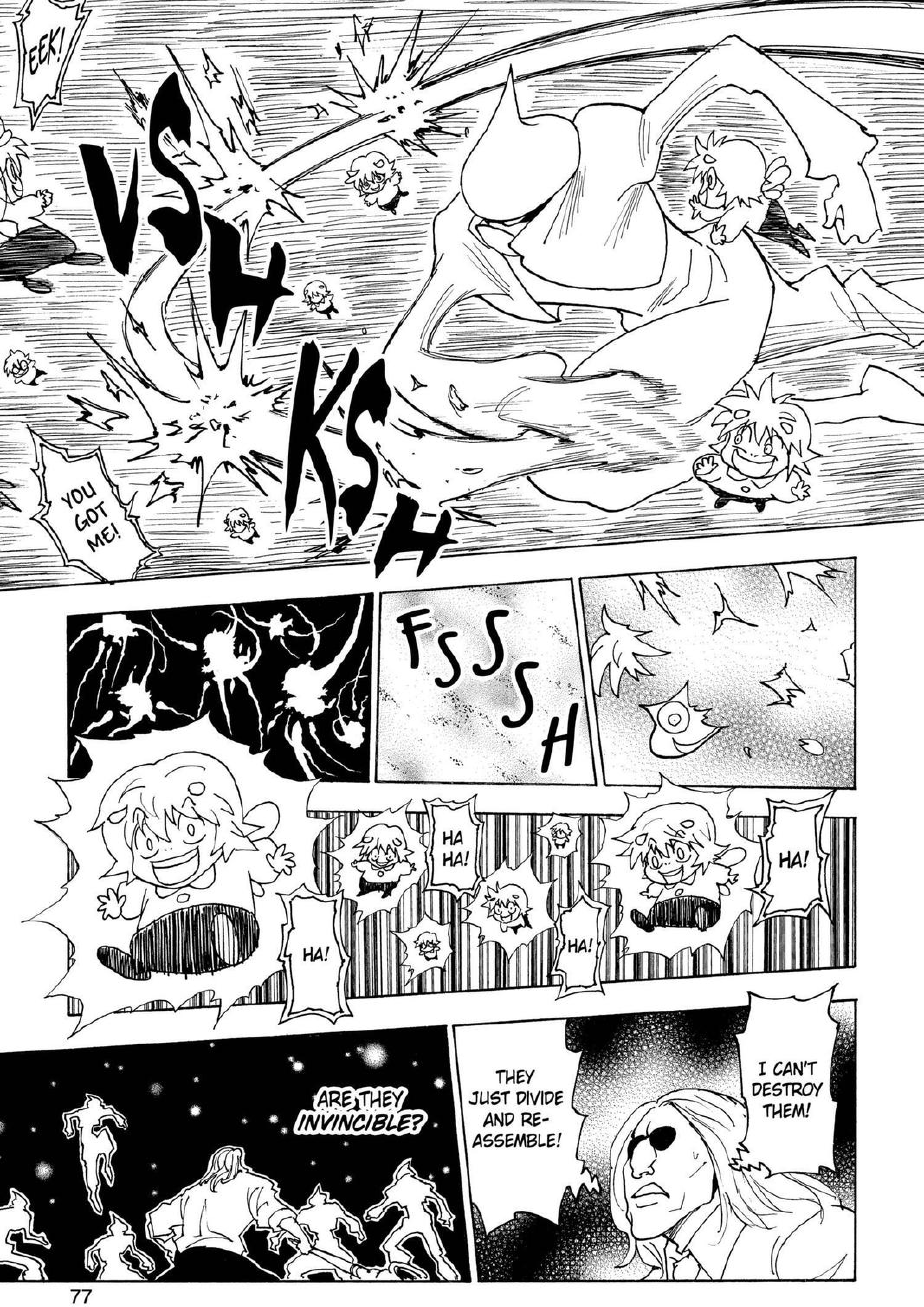

NO, I GAVE YOU TOO MUCH CREDIT.
FAR TOO MUCH!
BM!
POP
?!!

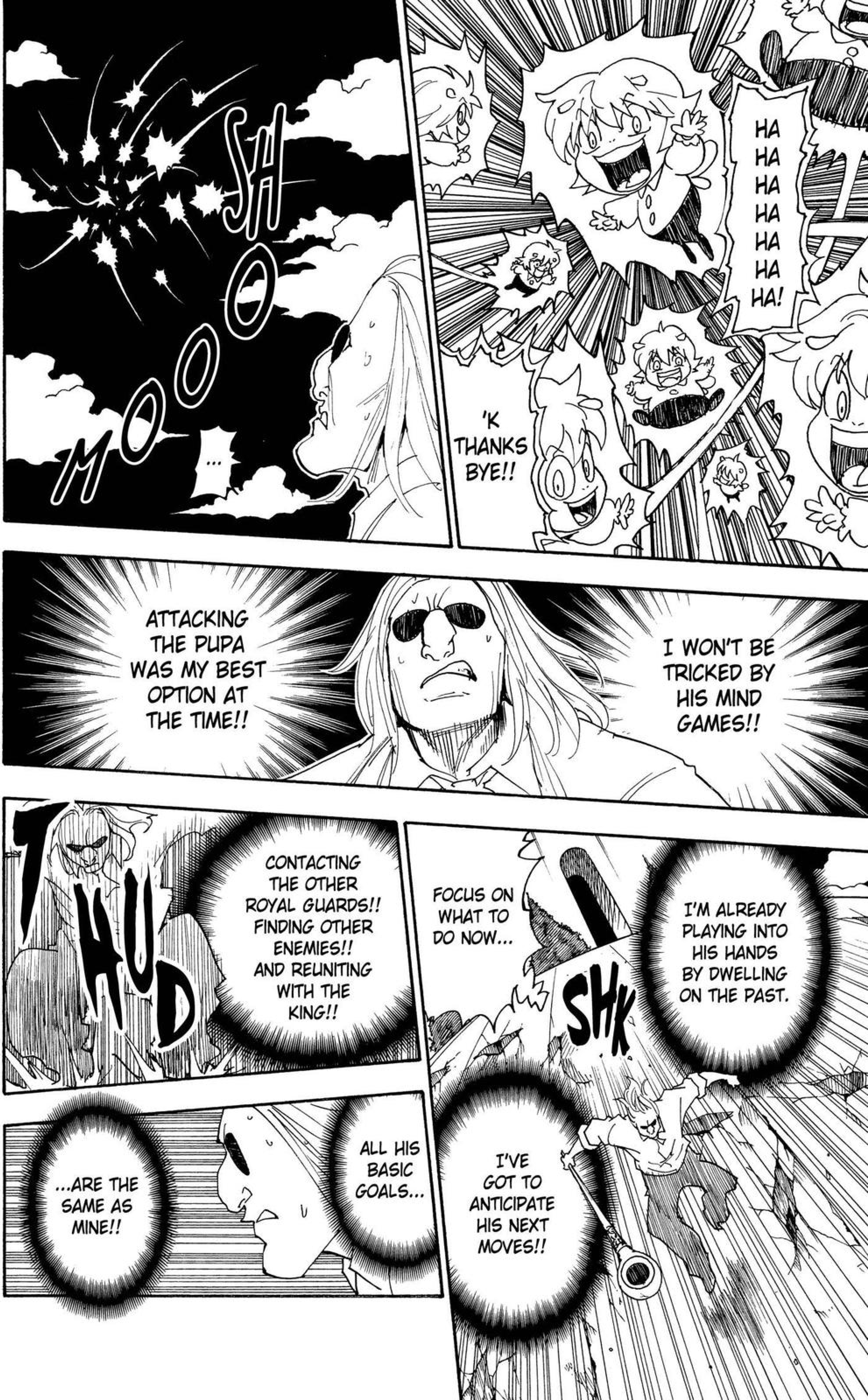

...
HE DIVIDED INTO SUPERFINE PARTICLES!!
THAT'S HOW HE SLIPPED THROUGH SMOKY JAIL. NO WONDER I COULDN'T SEE HIM.
FSSSSHH

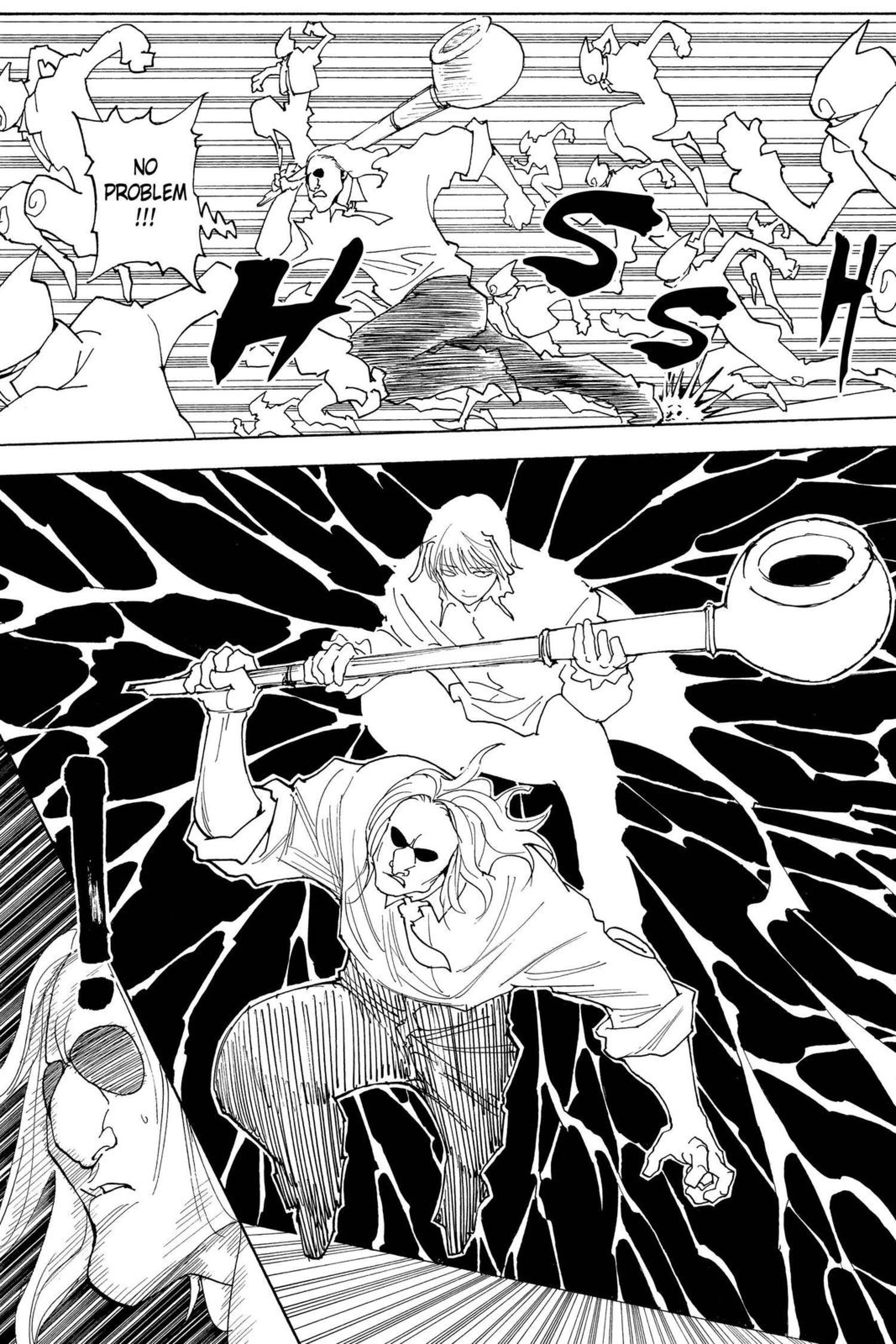

HEH.
HEH.
HEH.
HEH.
HEH.
HEH.
HEH.
HEH.
YOU SHOULD'VE WAITED.
HEH.
WHY?
HEH.
HEH.
SLIPPING THROUGH …
HEH.
HEH.
...WAS A LAST RESORT.
I WAS STUMPED...
...BY MY CONFINED SITUATION.
DO YOU EVER STOP LYING?
WHAT A LOUSY FEINT. YOU *DID* SLIP THROUGH.
HEH.
BUT NOTHING MORE.
HEH.
NOT AT THAT POINT.
HEH.


I FIGURED YOU'D CARRY THROUGH WITH YOUR ORIGINAL PLAN, FAITHFUL TO YOUR MISSION.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE A BETTER SOLDIER.
INSTEAD YOU FOOLISHLY RELEASED ME.
THANK YOU SO MUCH.
THANK YOU.
THANKS.
THANKS.
THANKS.
HEH.
THANKS.
HEH.
THANKS.
THANKS.
HEH.
THANKS.
HEH.
THANKS.
HEH.
THANKS.
THANKS.
HEH.
THANKS.
HEH.
HEH.
HEH.
THANKS.
HEH.
THANK YOU.
HEH.
HEH.
HEH.
HEH.
THANK YOU.
HEH.

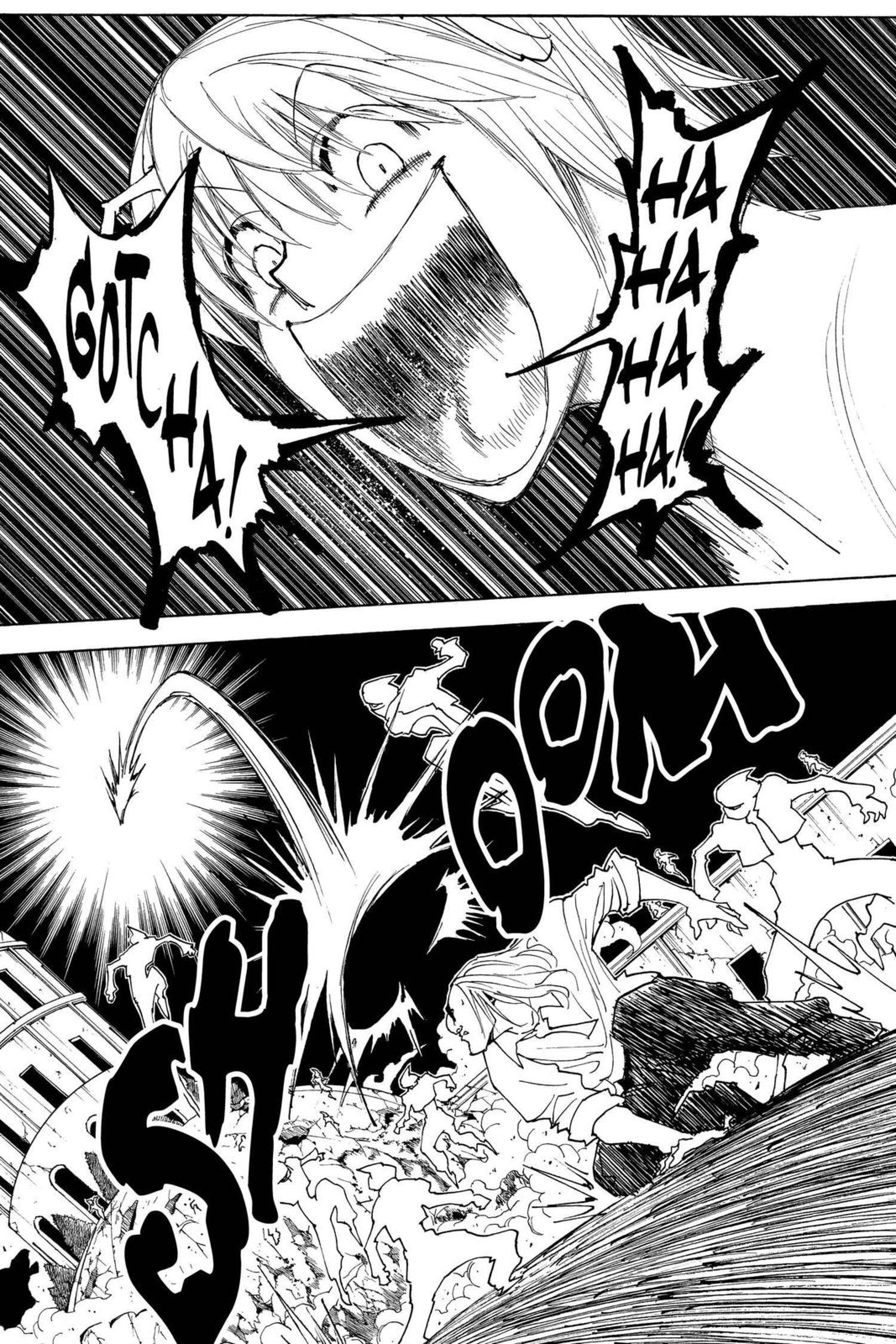

FOOOSH
"SMOKE TROOPERS": DEEP PURPLE !!!
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!!!
RUN AWAY!

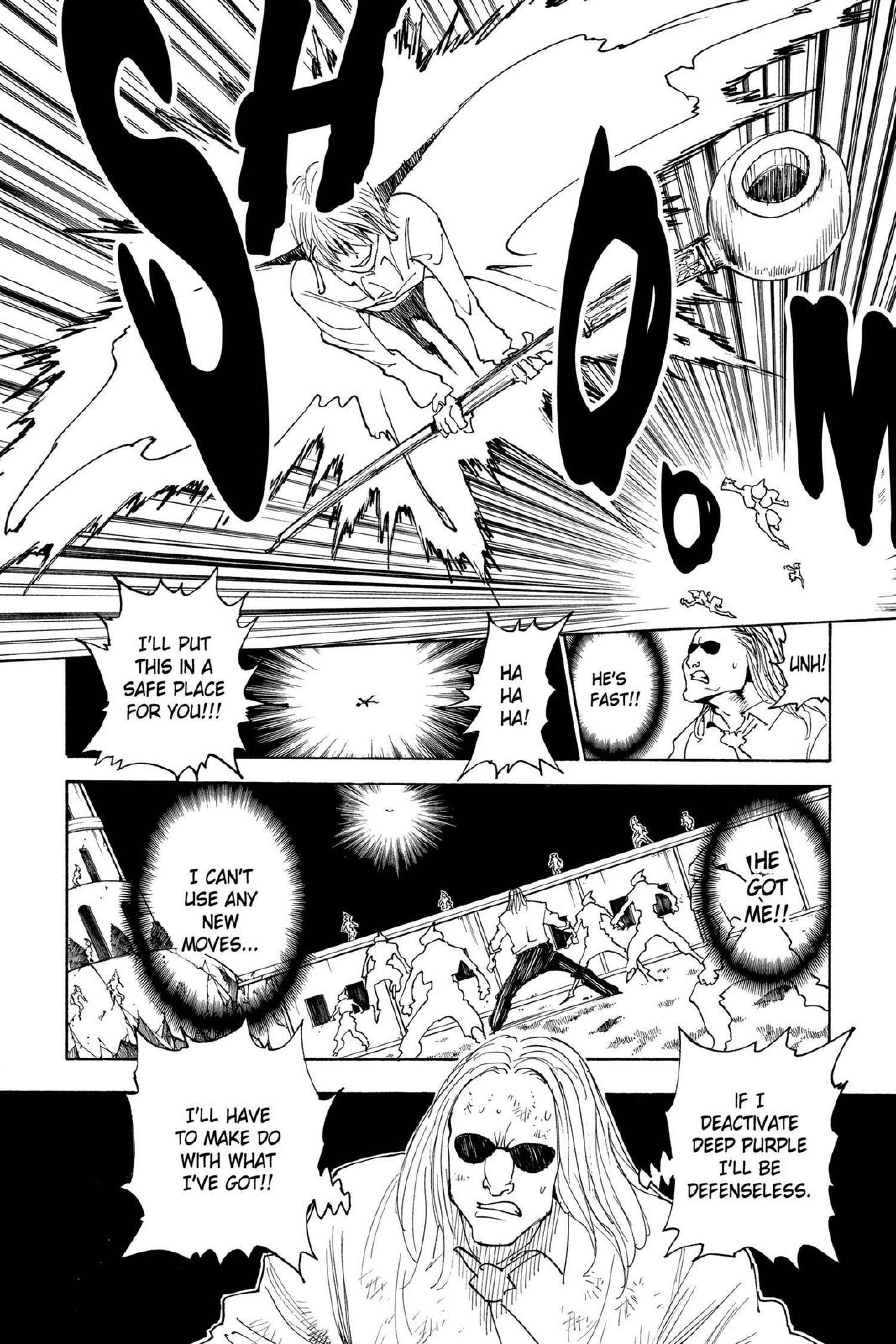

EEK!
VSH
KSH
YOU GOT ME!
FSSSH
HA!
HA!
HA HA!
HA!
I CAN'T DESTROY THEM!
THEY JUST DIVIDE AND RE-ASSEMBLE!
ARE THEY INVINCIBLE?

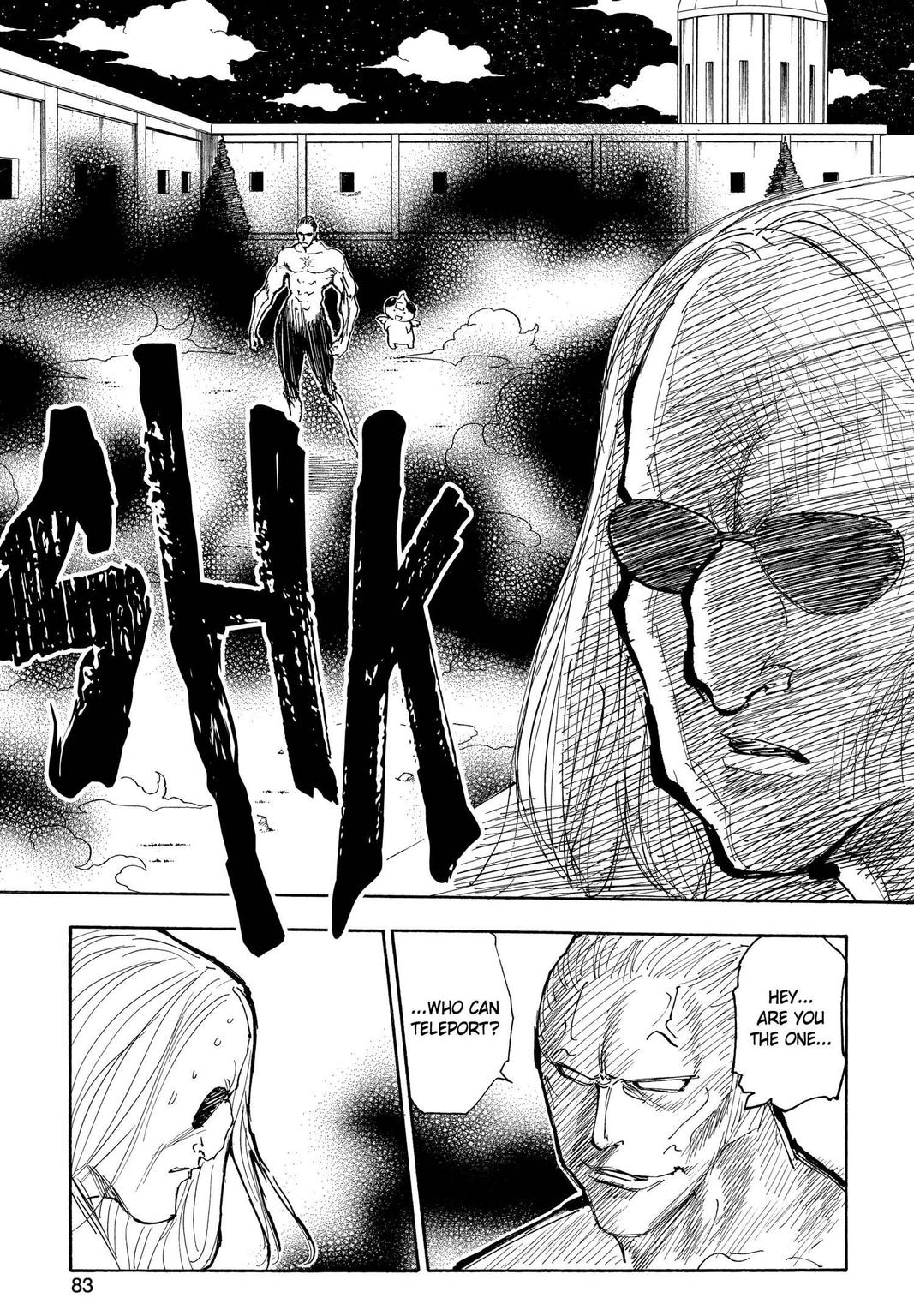

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!
'K THANKS BYE!!
SHOOOOM
...
I WON'T BE TRICKED BY HIS MIND GAMES!!
ATTACKING THE PUPA WAS MY BEST OPTION AT THE TIME!!
I'M ALREADY PLAYING INTO HIS HANDS BY DWELLING ON THE PAST.
FOCUS ON WHAT TO DO NOW...
SHK
CONTACTING THE OTHER ROYAL GUARDS!! FINDING OTHER ENEMIES!! AND REUNITING WITH THE KING!!
THUD
I'VE GOT TO ANTICIPATE HIS NEXT MOVES!!
ALL HIS BASIC GOALS...
...ARE THE SAME AS MINE!!

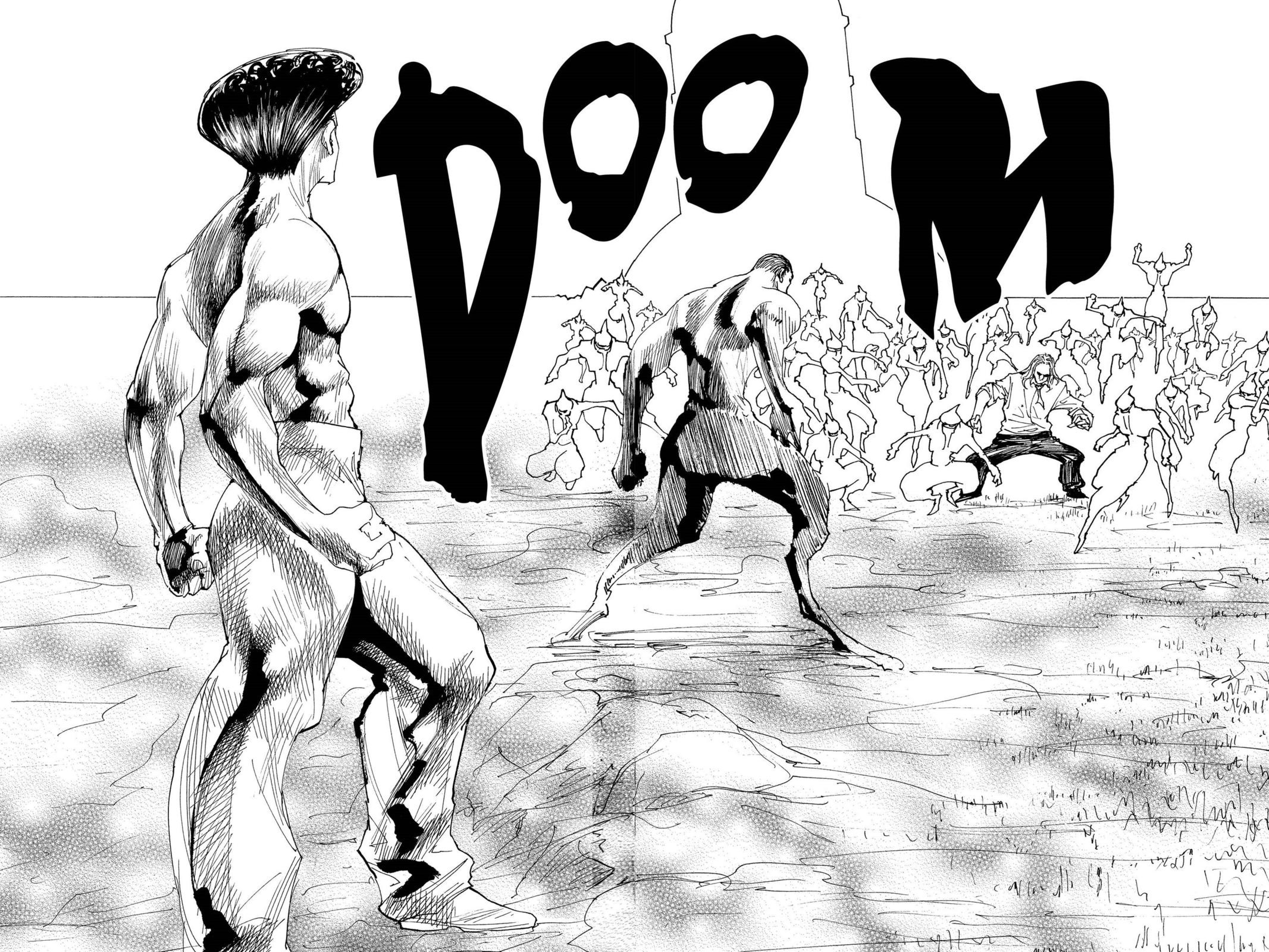

NO PROBLEM !!!
HSSH
!

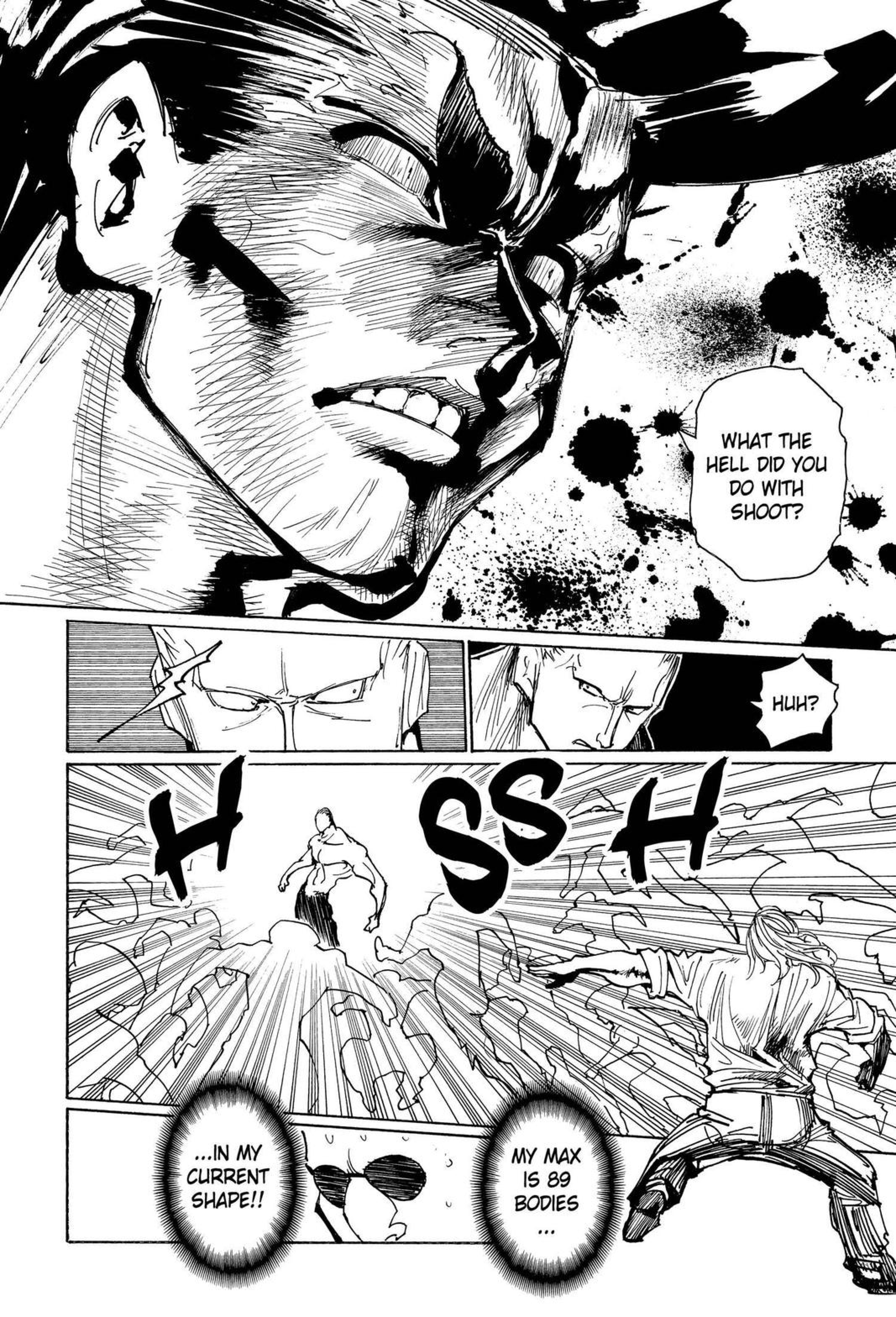
UGH!!
SPLAT

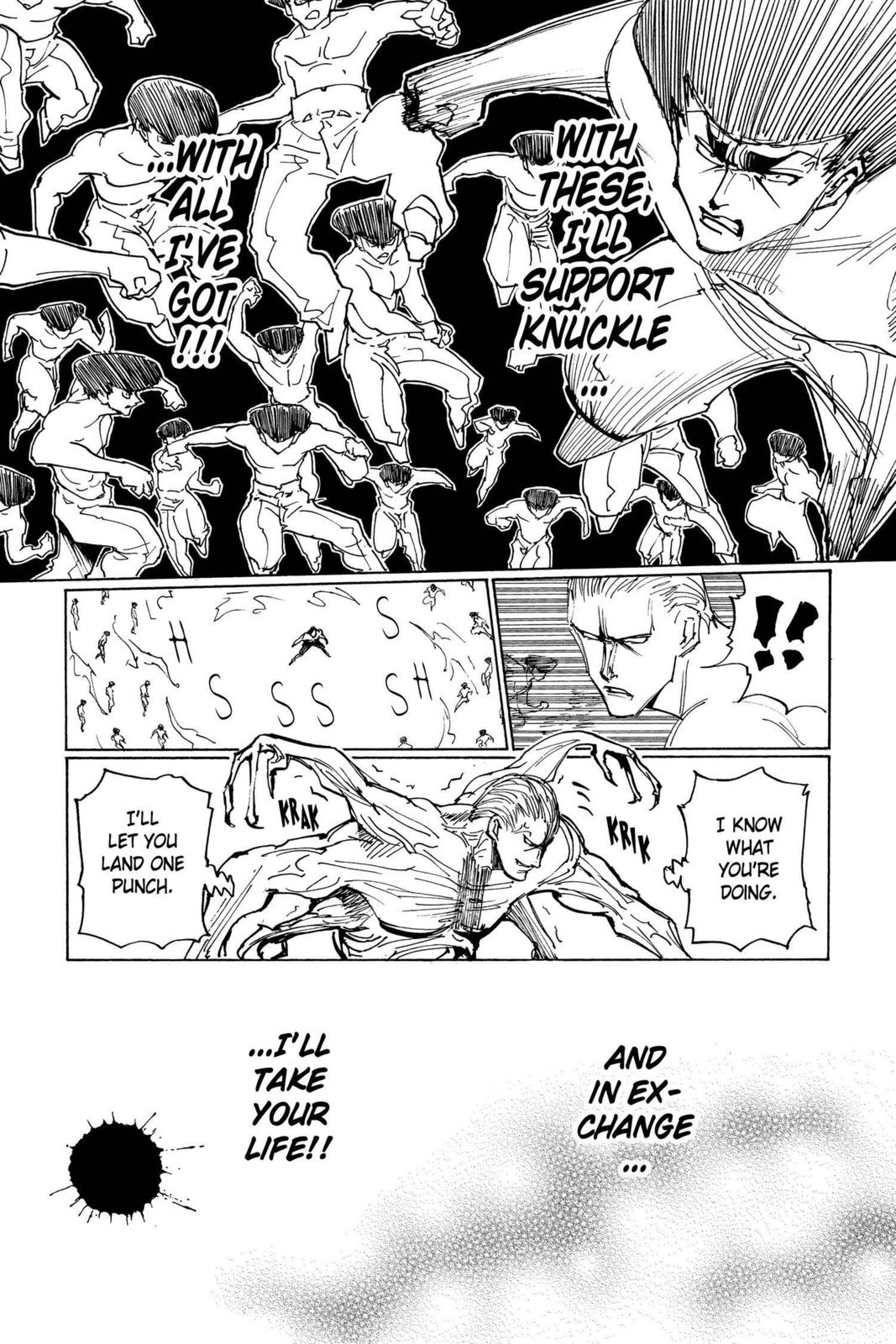

HA HA HA HA HA!
GOTCHA!
SHOOOM


SHOOOM
UNH!
HE'S FAST!!
HA HA HA!
I'LL PUT THIS IN A SAFE PLACE FOR YOU!!!
HE GOT ME!!
I CAN'T USE ANY NEW MOVES...
IF I DEACTIVATE DEEP PURPLE I'LL BE DEFENSELESS.
I'LL HAVE TO MAKE DO WITH WHAT I'VE GOT!!

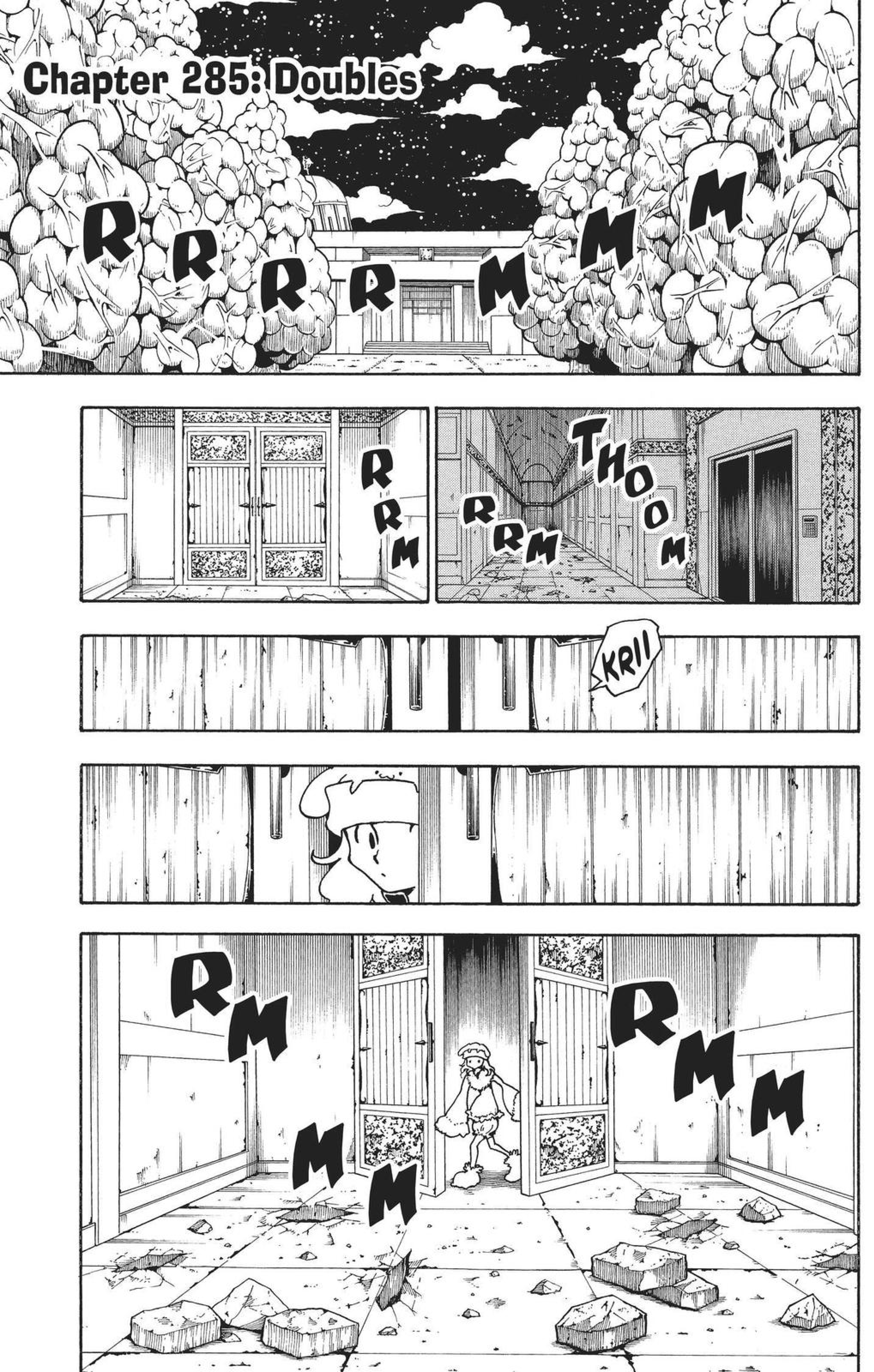

SHK
HEY... ARE YOU THE ONE...
...WHO CAN TELEPORT?

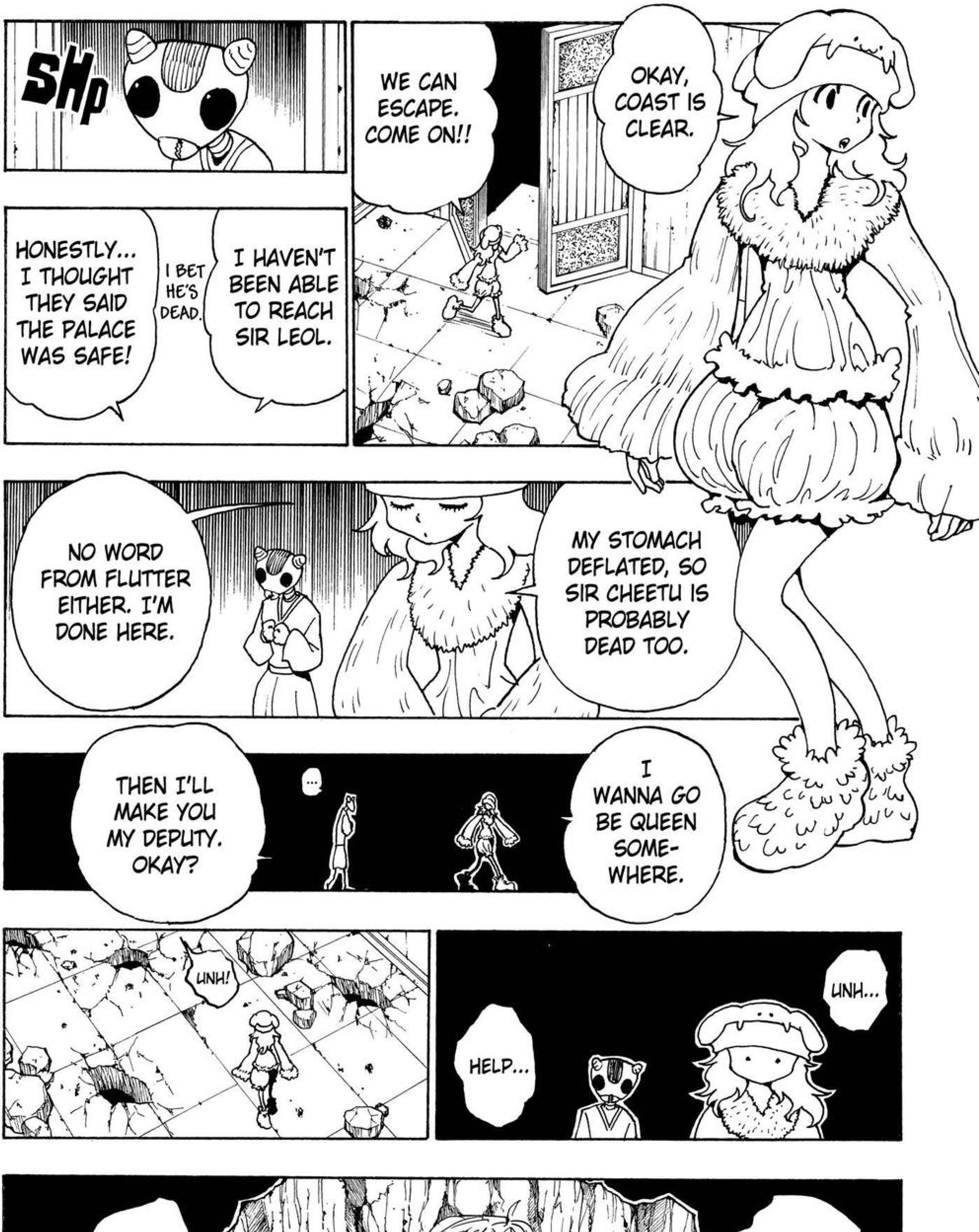

DOOM

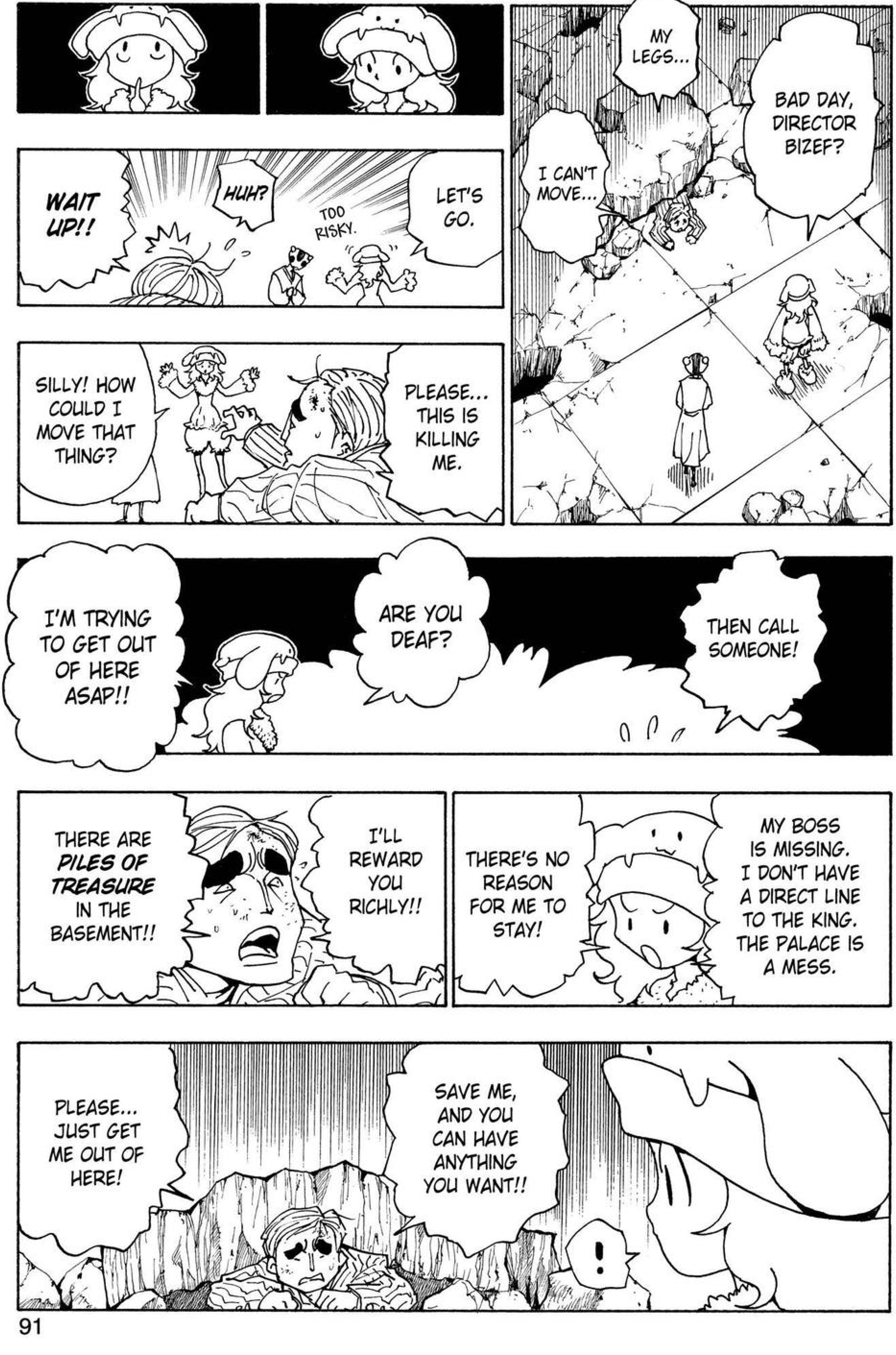

WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO WITH SHOOT?
HUH?
HSSH
MY MAX IS 89 BODIES ...
...IN MY CURRENT SHAPE!!

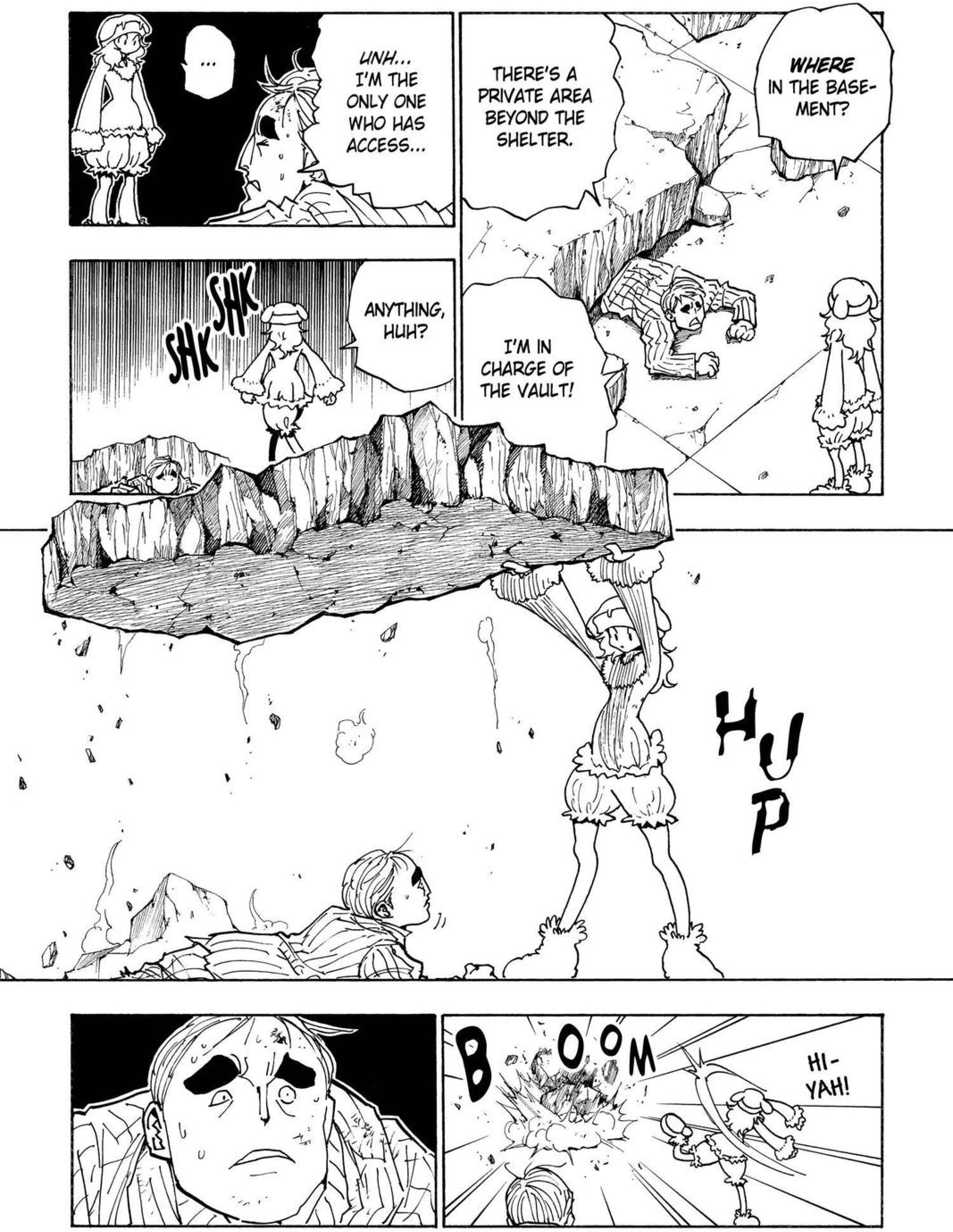

WITH THESE, I'LL SUPPORT KNUCKLE...
...WITH ALL I'VE GOT!!!
!!
SHSSSSH
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING.
KRIK
KRAK
I'LL LET YOU LAND ONE PUNCH.
AND IN EXCHANGE...
...I'LL TAKE YOUR LIFE!!

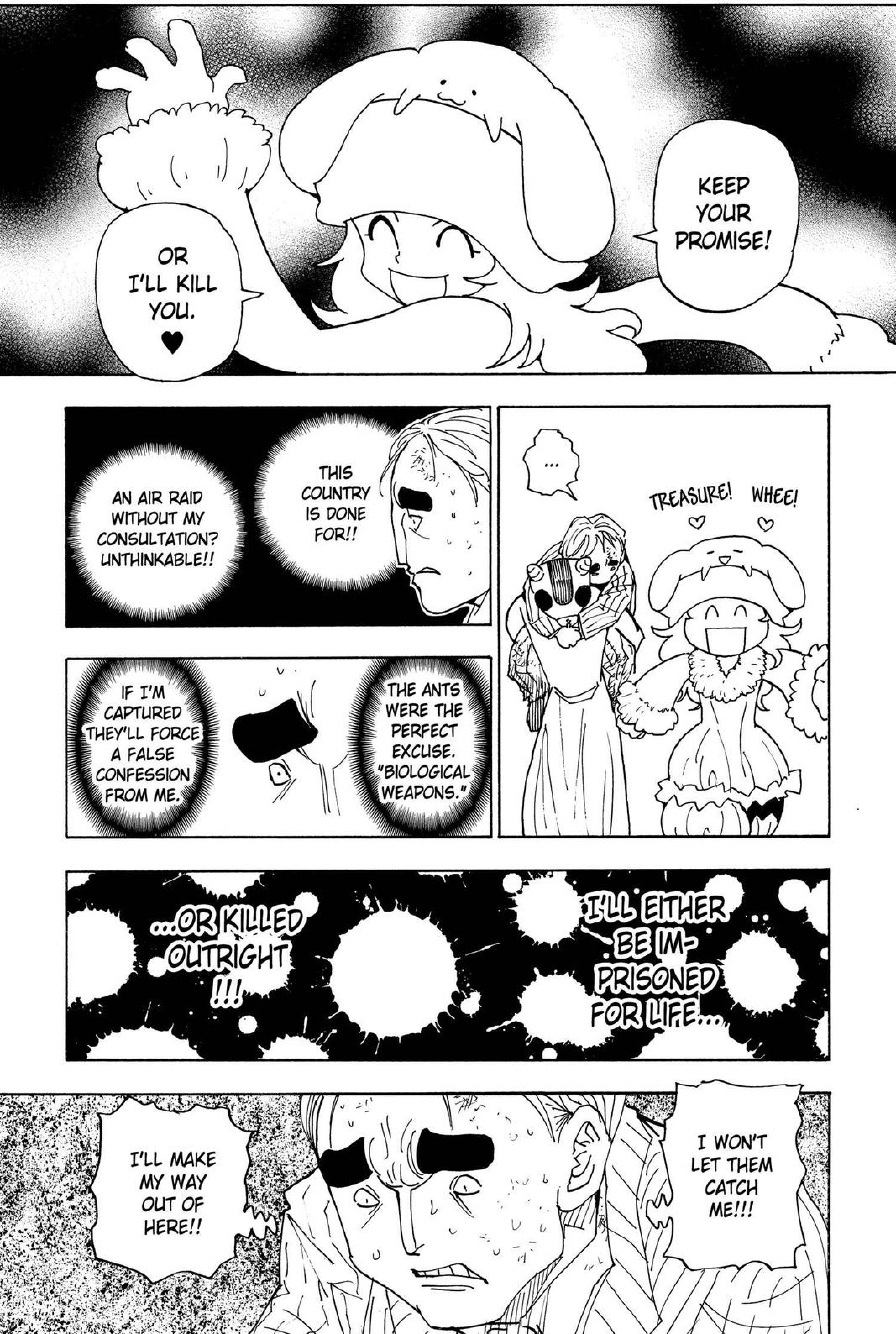
Chapter 285: Doubles

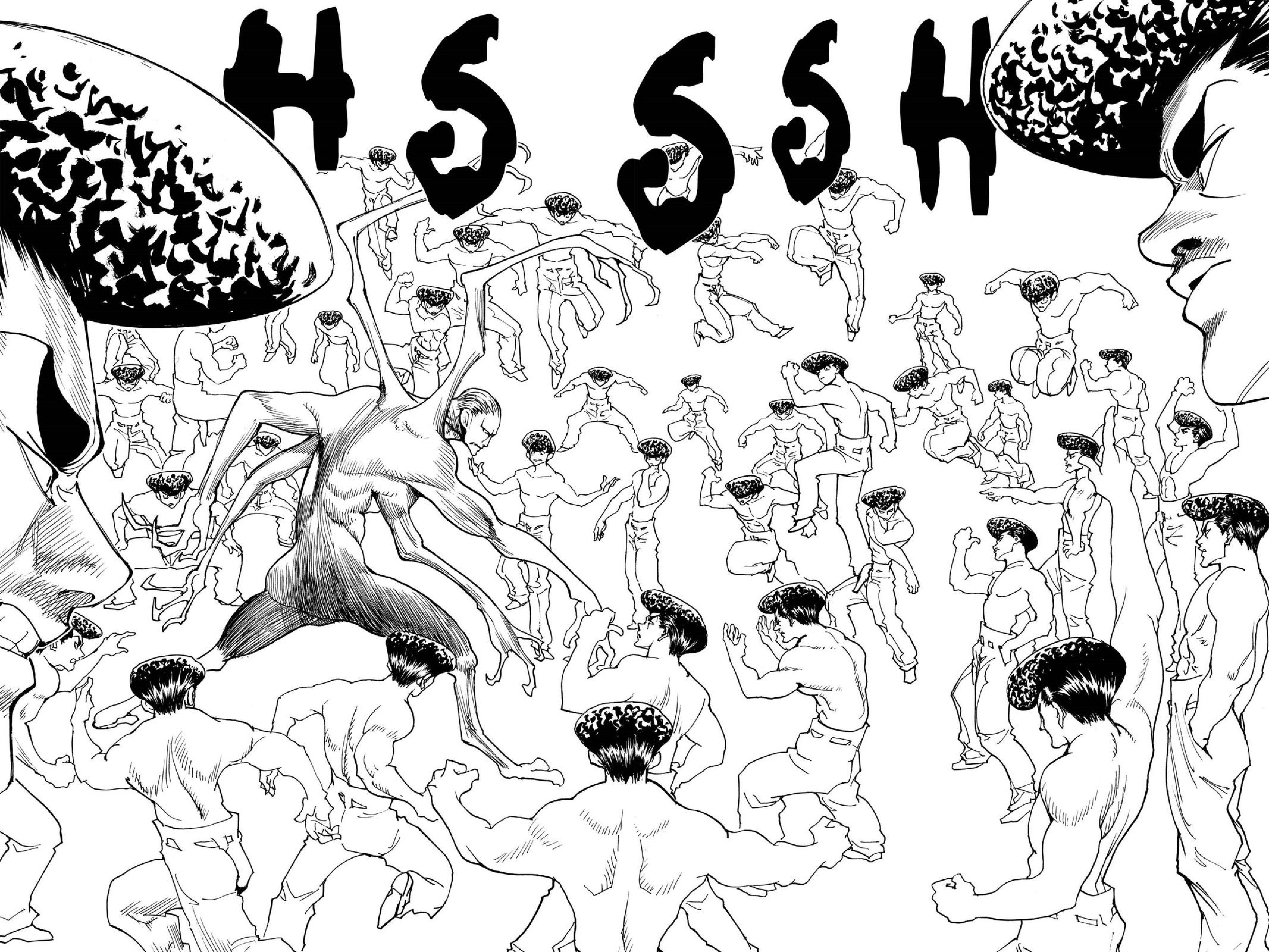

RRRRRMMMMM
THOOOM
RRRM
RRRM
KRII
RMMM
RMMM

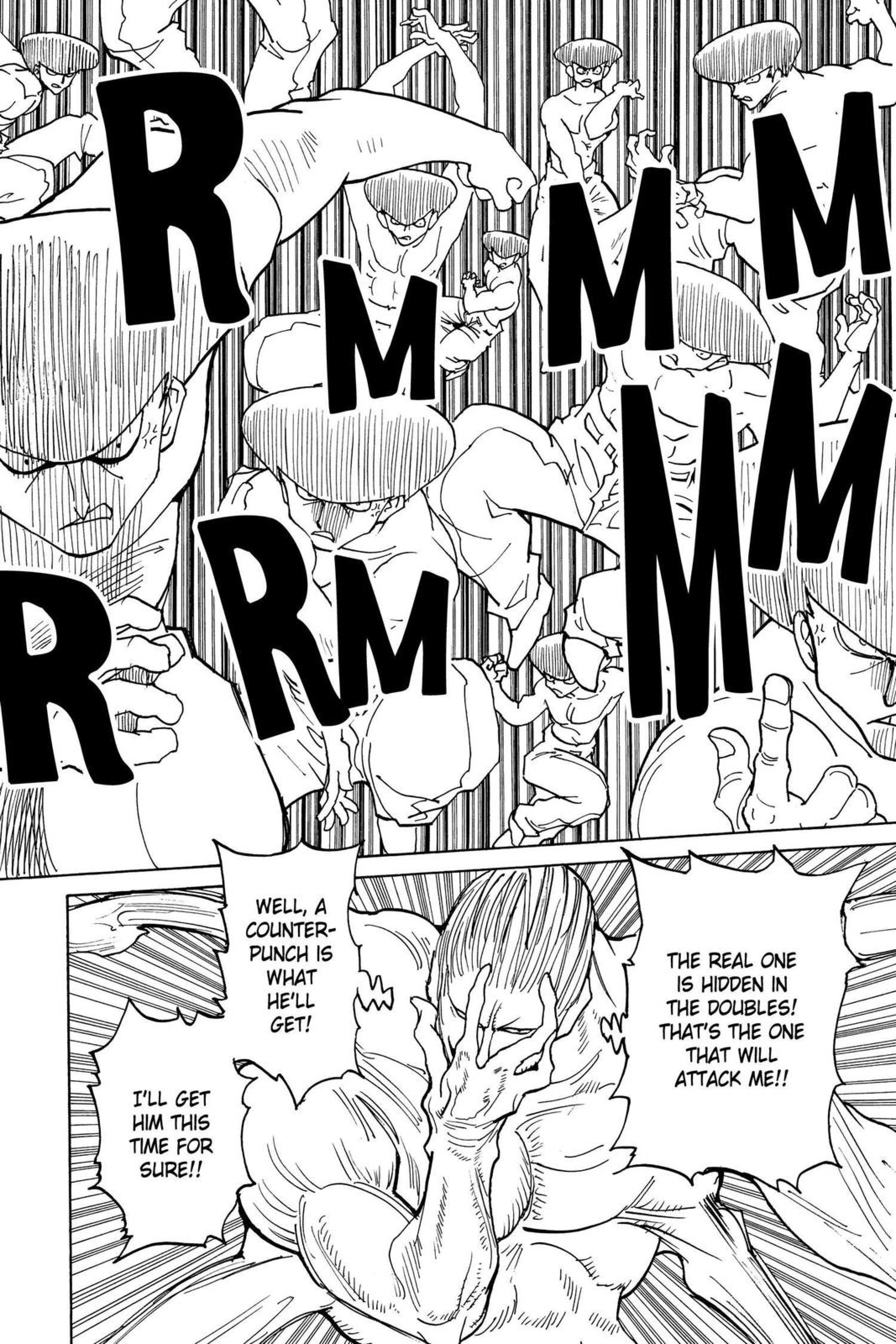

OKAY, COAST IS CLEAR.
WE CAN ESCAPE. COME ON!!
SHp
I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO REACH SIR LEOL.
I BET HE'S DEAD.
HONESTLY... I THOUGHT THEY SAID THE PALACE WAS SAFE!
MY STOMACH DEFLATED, SO SIR CHEETU IS PROBABLY DEAD TOO.
NO WORD FROM FLUTTER EITHER. I'M DONE HERE.
I WANNA GO BE QUEEN SOMEWHERE.
...
THEN I'LL MAKE YOU MY DEPUTY. OKAY?
UNH...
HELP...
UNH!
PLEASE... GET ME OUT...
HELP ME...

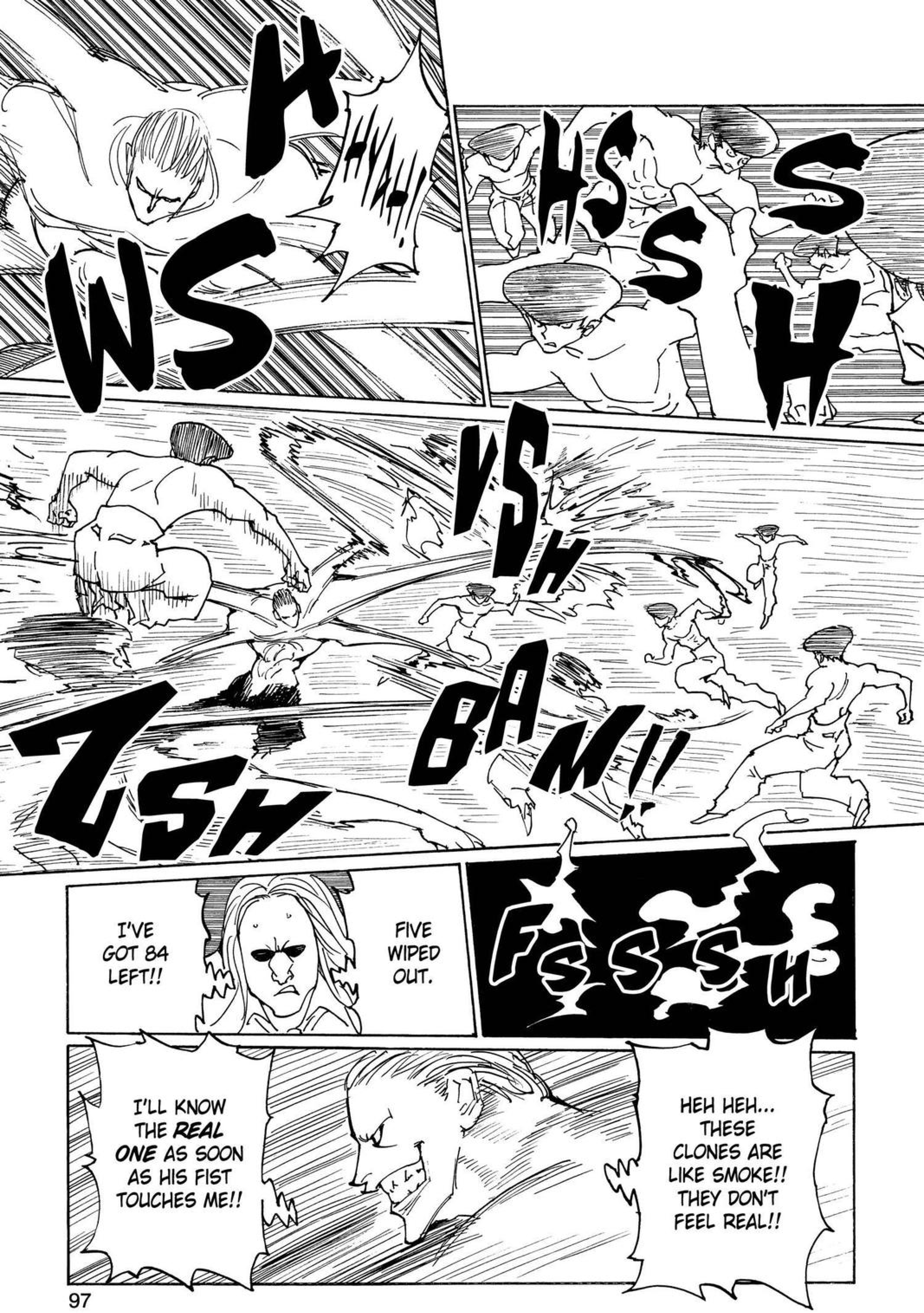

BAD DAY, DIRECTOR BIZEF?
MY LEGS...
I CAN'T MOVE...
LET'S GO.
TOO RISKY.
HUH?
WAIT UP!!
PLEASE... THIS IS KILLING ME.
SILLY! HOW COULD I MOVE THAT THING?
THEN CALL SOMEONE!
ARE YOU DEAF?
I'M TRYING TO GET OUT OF HERE ASAP!!
MY BOSS IS MISSING. I DON'T HAVE A DIRECT LINE TO THE KING. THE PALACE IS A MESS.
THERE'S NO REASON FOR ME TO STAY!
I'LL REWARD YOU RICHLY!!
THERE ARE PILES OF TREASURE IN THE BASEMENT!!
SAVE ME, AND YOU CAN HAVE ANYTHING YOU WANT!!
PLEASE... JUST GET ME OUT OF HERE!
!

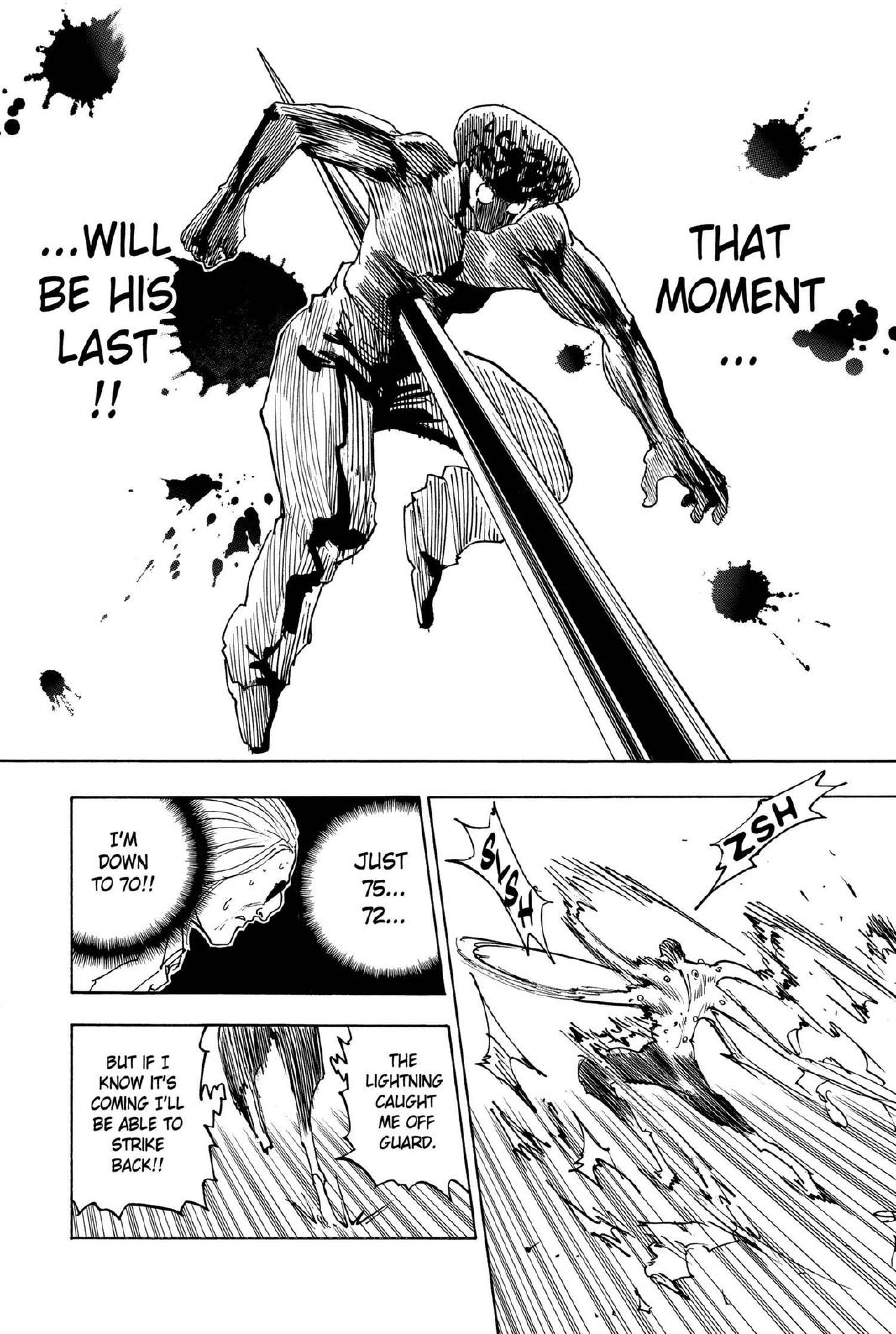

WHERE IN THE BASEMENT?
THERE'S A PRIVATE AREA BEYOND THE SHELTER.
I'M IN CHARGE OF THE VAULT!
...
UNH... I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS ACCESS...
ANYTHING, HUH?
SHK SHK
HUP
HI-YAH!
BOOM

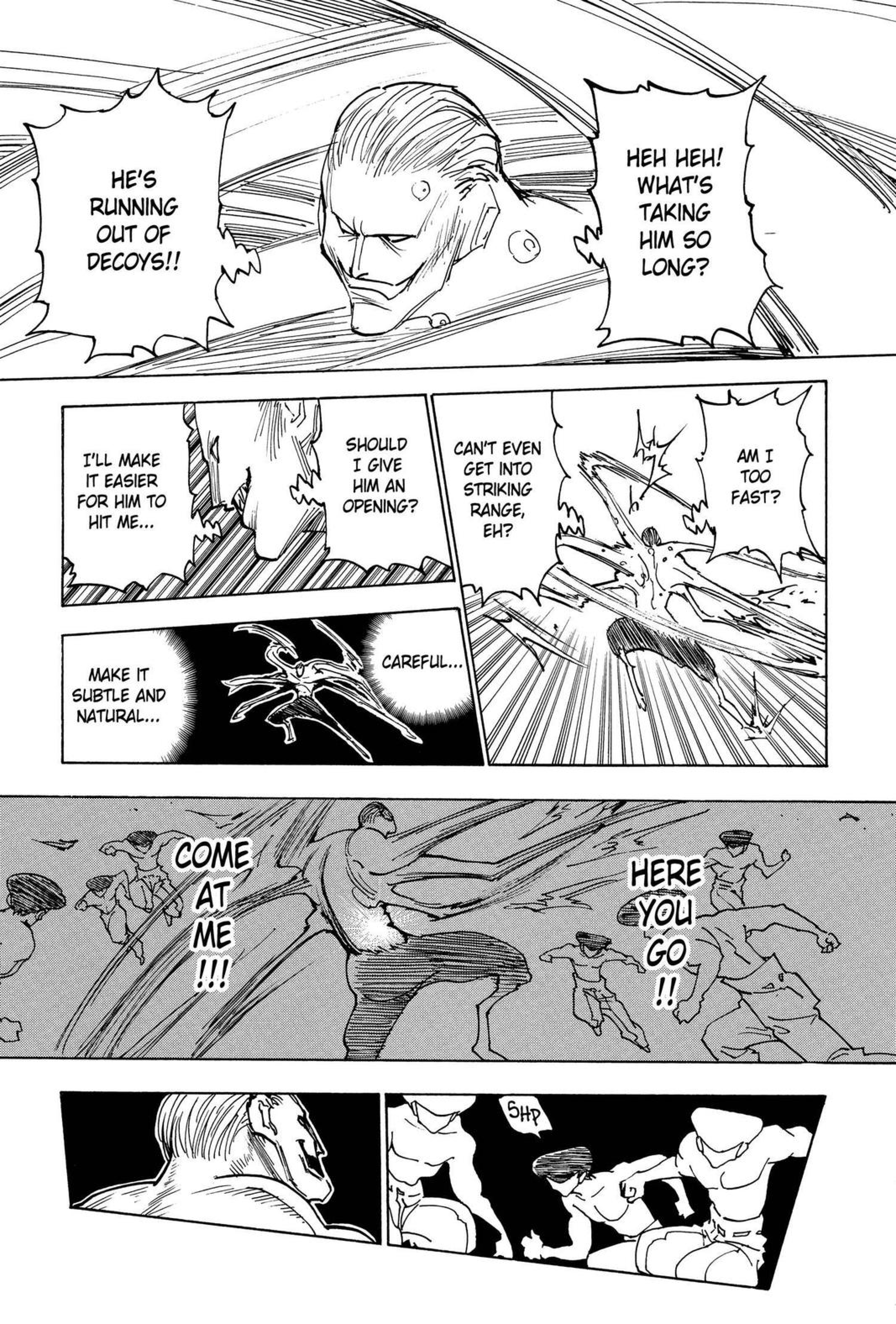

KEEP YOUR PROMISE!
OR I'LL KILL YOU. ♥
...
TREASURE! ♡
WHEE! ♡
THIS COUNTRY IS DONE FOR!!
AN AIR RAID WITHOUT MY CONSULTATION? UNTHINKABLE!!
THE ANTS WERE THE PERFECT EXCUSE. "BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS."
IF I'M CAPTURED THEY'LL FORCE A FALSE CONFESSION FROM ME.
I'LL EITHER BE IMPRISONED FOR LIFE...
...OR KILLED OUTRIGHT!!!
I WON'T LET THEM CATCH ME!!!
I'LL MAKE MY WAY OUT OF HERE!!

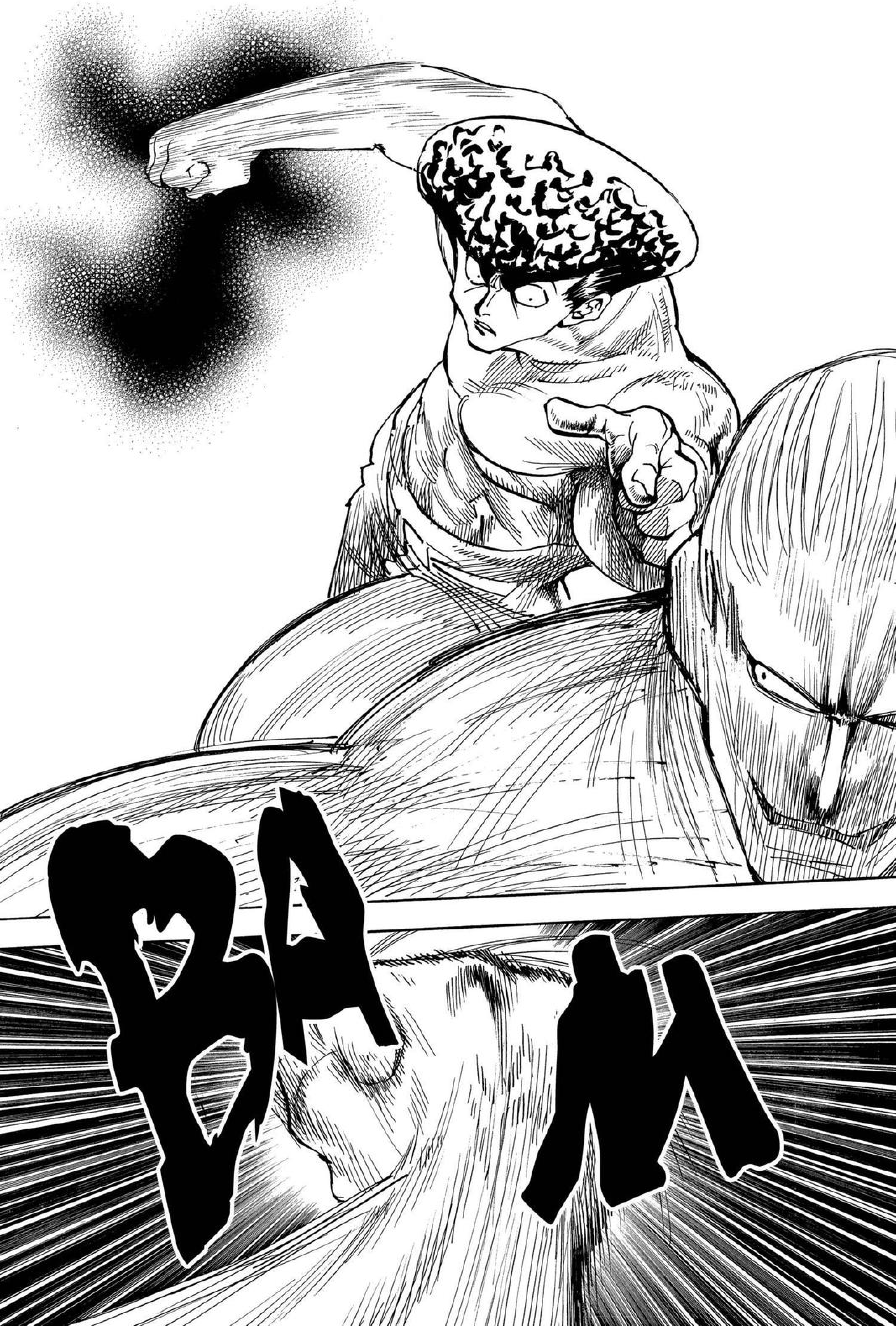

HSSSH

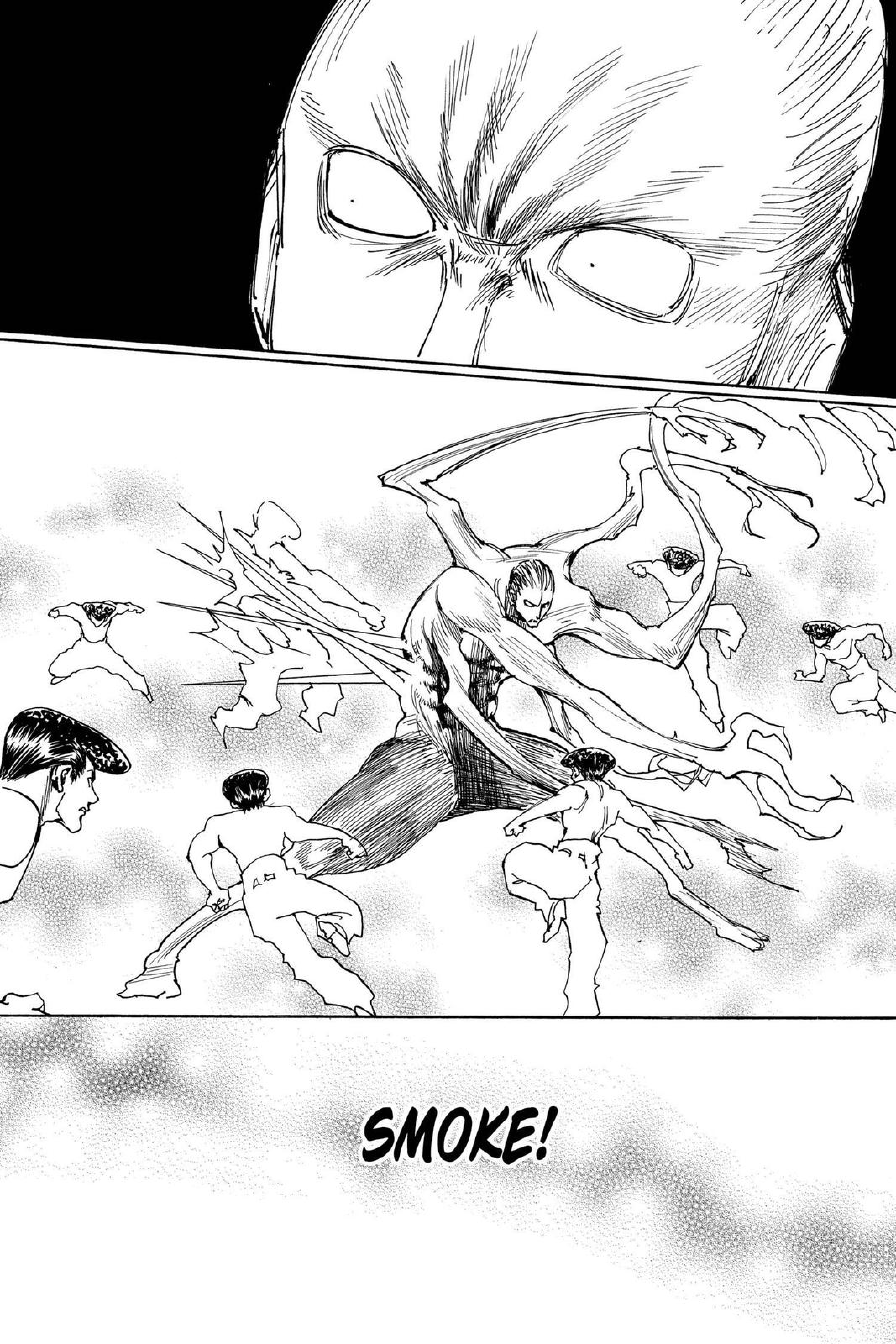

RRRMMMMMM
THE REAL ONE IS HIDDEN IN THE DOUBLES! THAT'S THE ONE THAT WILL ATTACK ME!!
WELL, A COUNTER-PUNCH IS WHAT HE'LL GET!
I'LL GET HIM THIS TIME FOR SURE!!

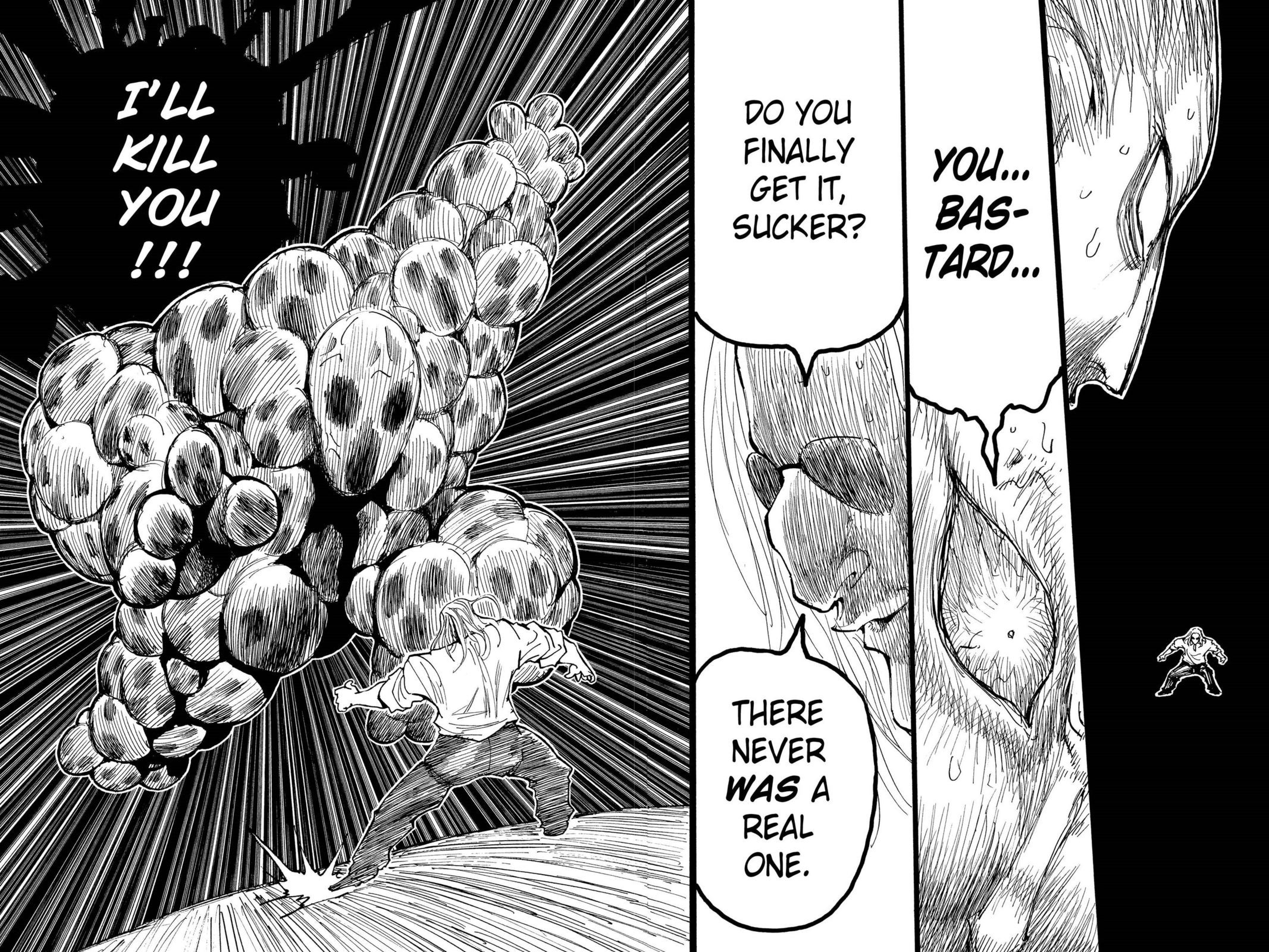

HSSSH
WSHH
VSH
BAM!!
ZSH
FSSSH
FIVE WIPED OUT.
I'VE GOT 84 LEFT!!
HEH HEH... THESE CLONES ARE LIKE SMOKE!! THEY DON'T FEEL REAL!!
I'LL KNOW THE ***REAL ONE*** AS SOON AS HIS FIST TOUCHES ME!!

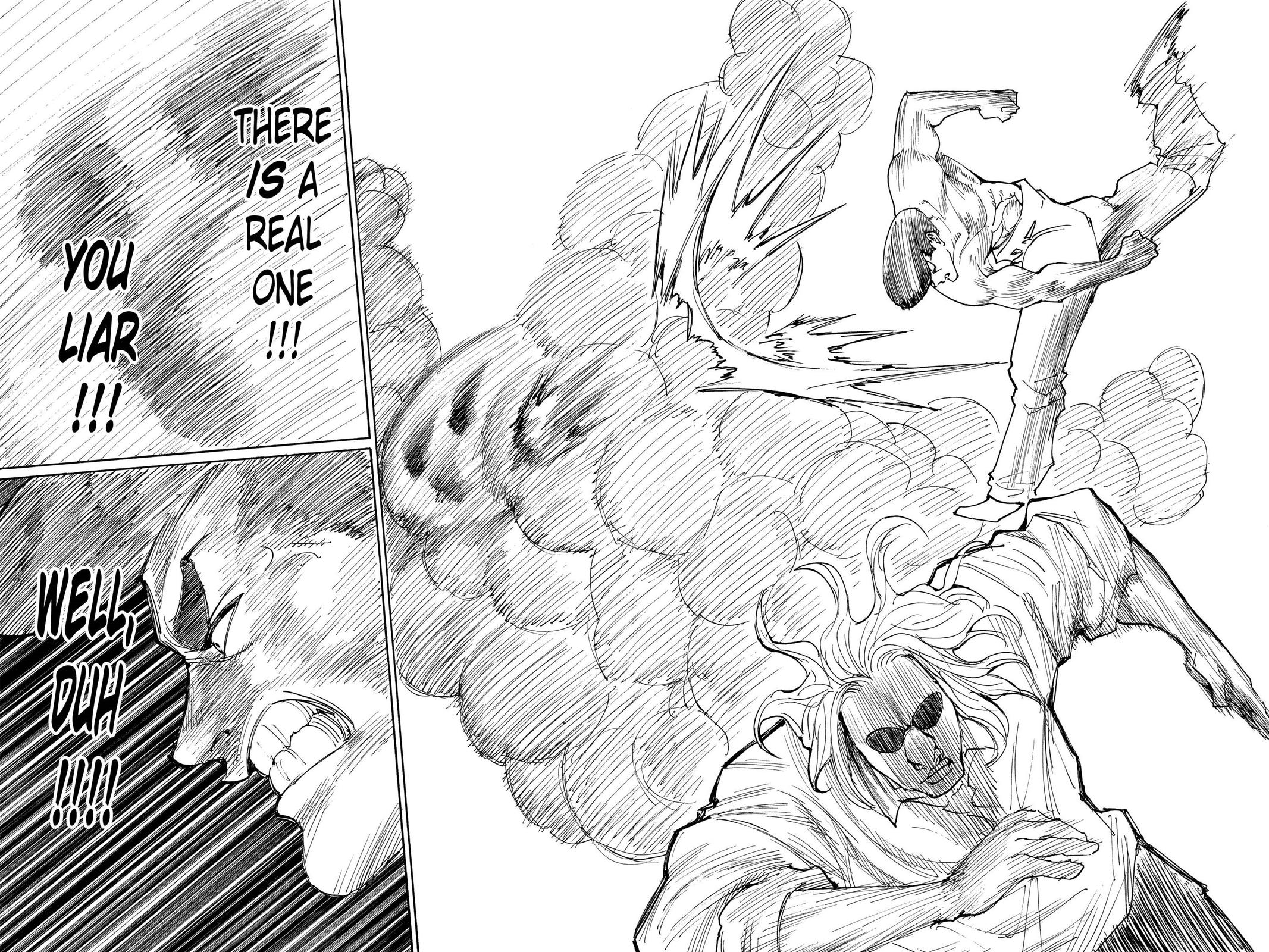

THAT MOMENT…
…WILL BE HIS LAST!!
ZSH
SVSH
JUST 75… 72…
I'M DOWN TO 70!!
THE LIGHTNING CAUGHT ME OFF GUARD.
BUT IF I KNOW IT'S COMING I'LL BE ABLE TO STRIKE BACK!!

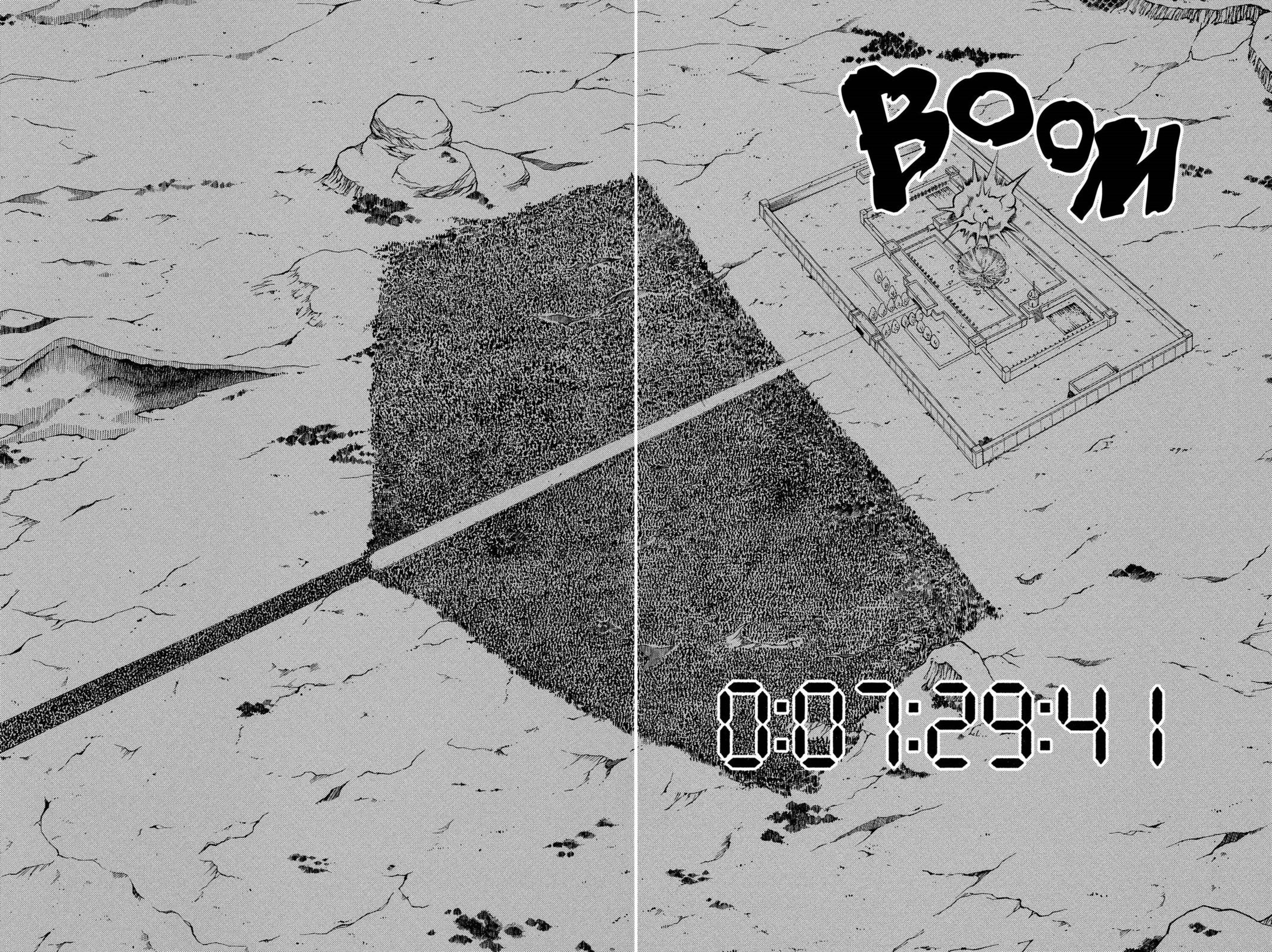

HEH HEH! WHAT'S TAKING HIM SO LONG?
HE'S RUNNING OUT OF DECOYS!!
AM I TOO FAST?
CAN'T EVEN GET INTO STRIKING RANGE, EH?
SHOULD I GIVE HIM AN OPENING?
I'LL MAKE IT EASIER FOR HIM TO HIT ME...
CAREFUL...
MAKE IT SUBTLE AND NATURAL...
HERE YOU GO!!
COME AT ME!!!
SHP

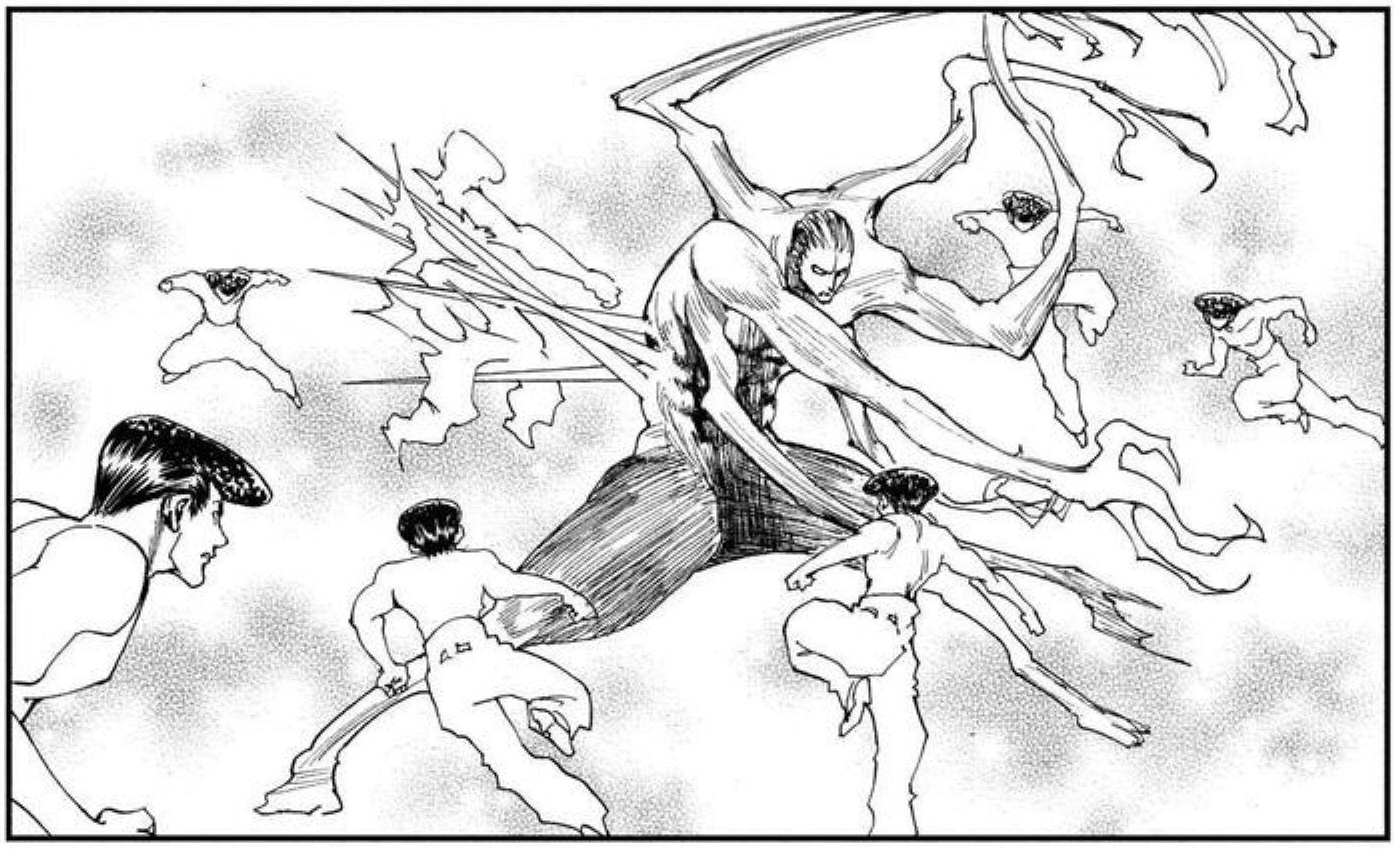

BAM


SMOKE!

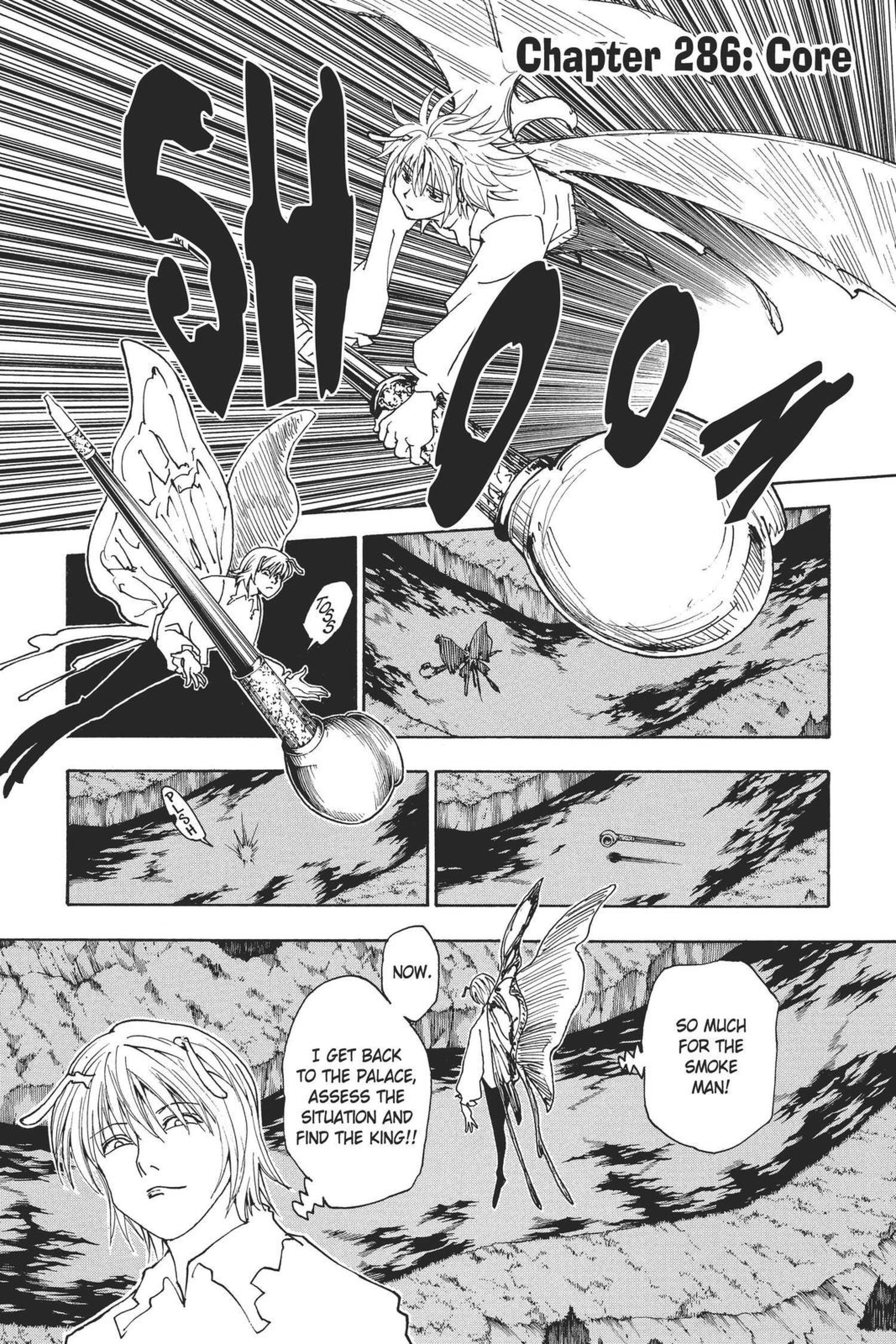

YOU... BASTARD...
DO YOU FINALLY GET IT, SUCKER?
THERE NEVER WAS A REAL ONE.
I'LL KILL YOU!!!

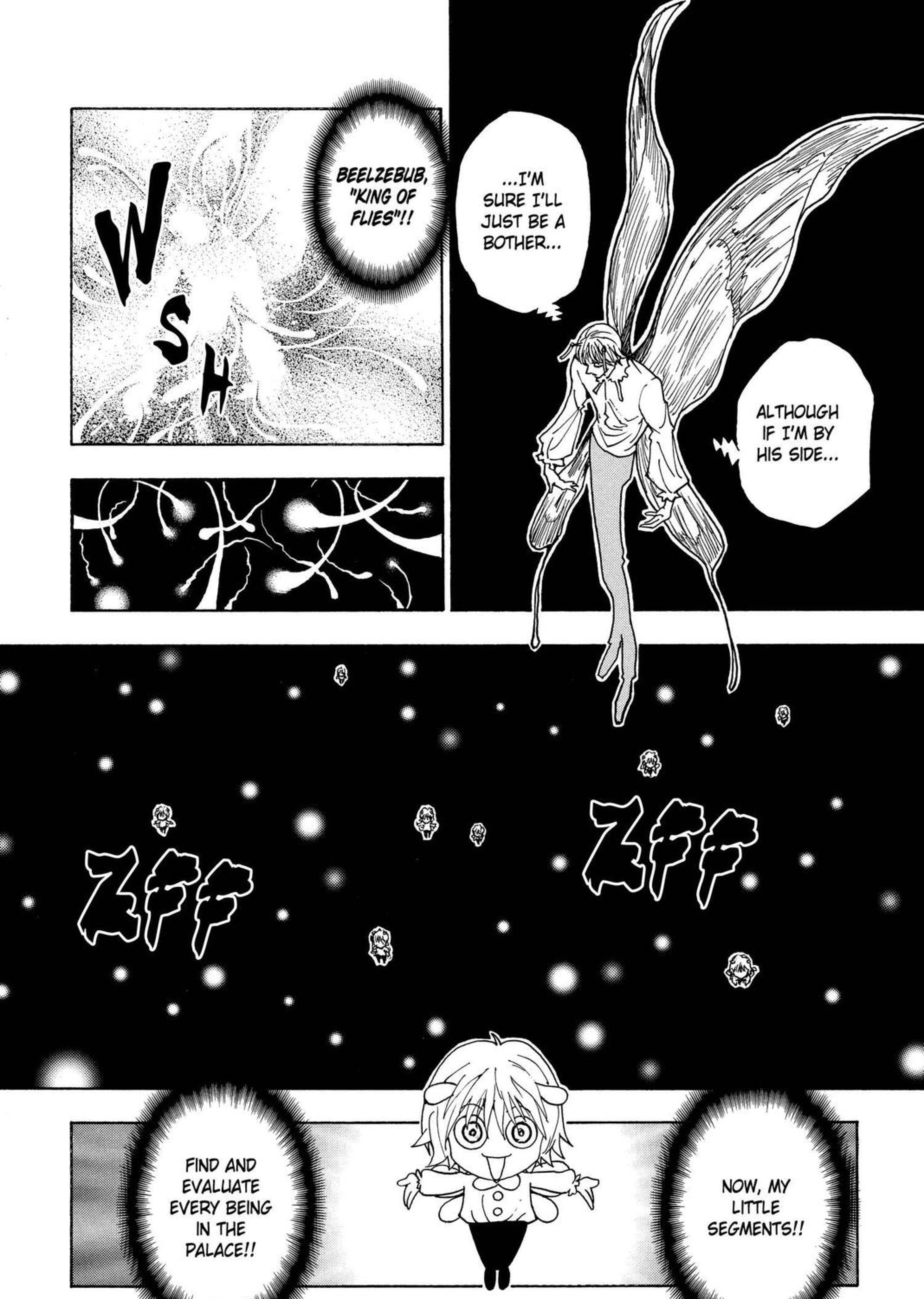

THERE IS A REAL ONE !!!
YOU LIAR !!!
WELL, DUH !!!!

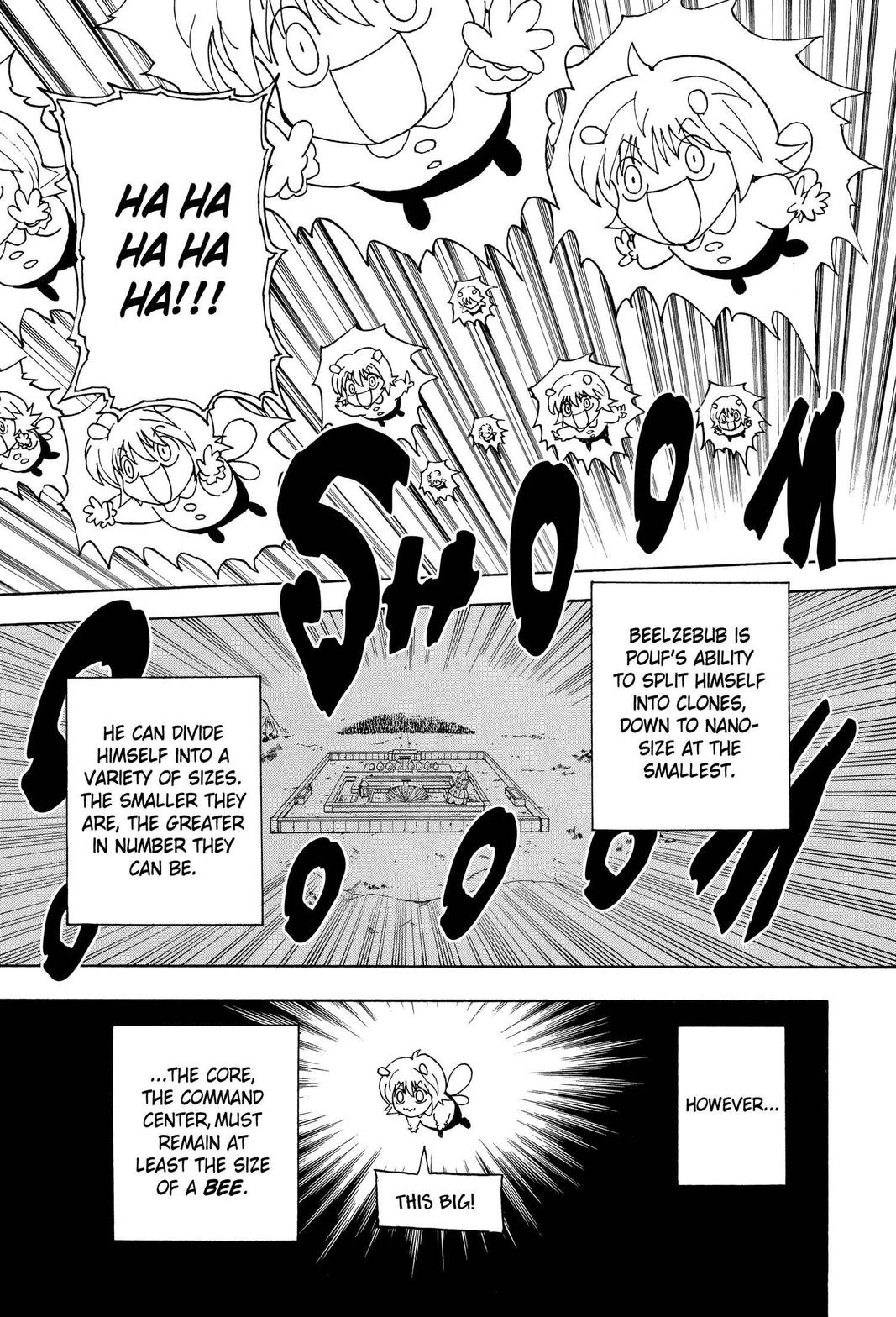

BOOM
0:07:29:41

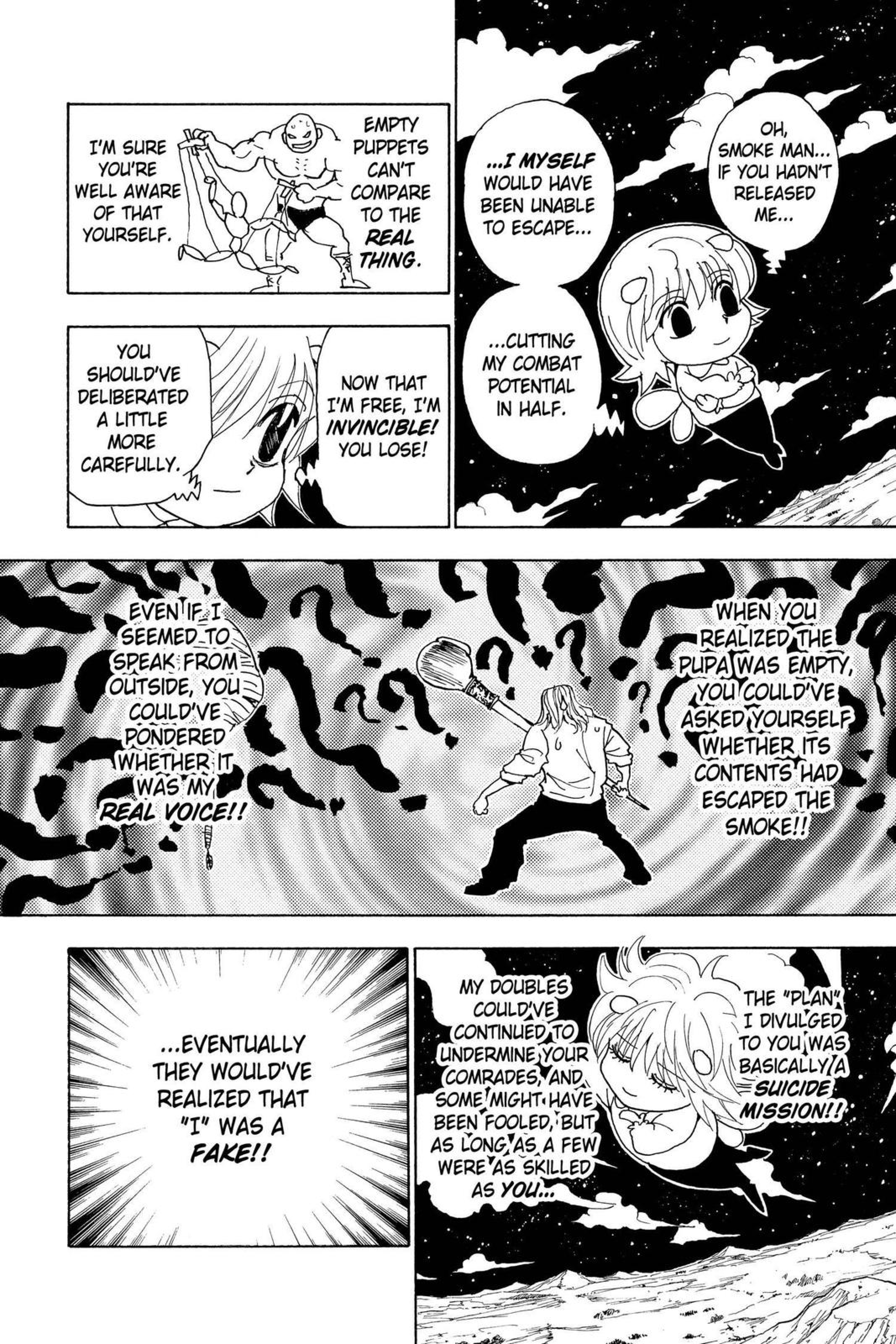


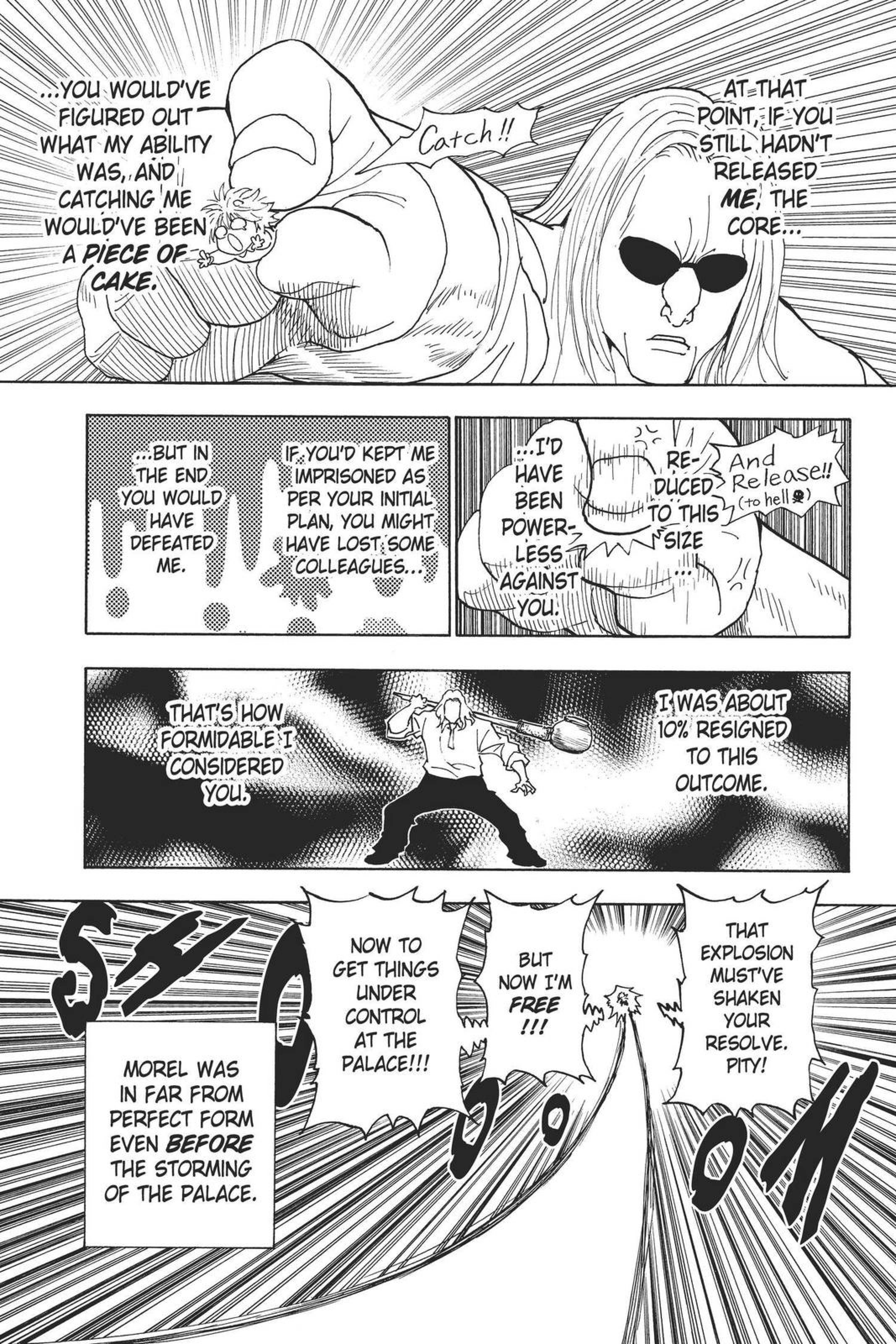
Chapter 286: Core

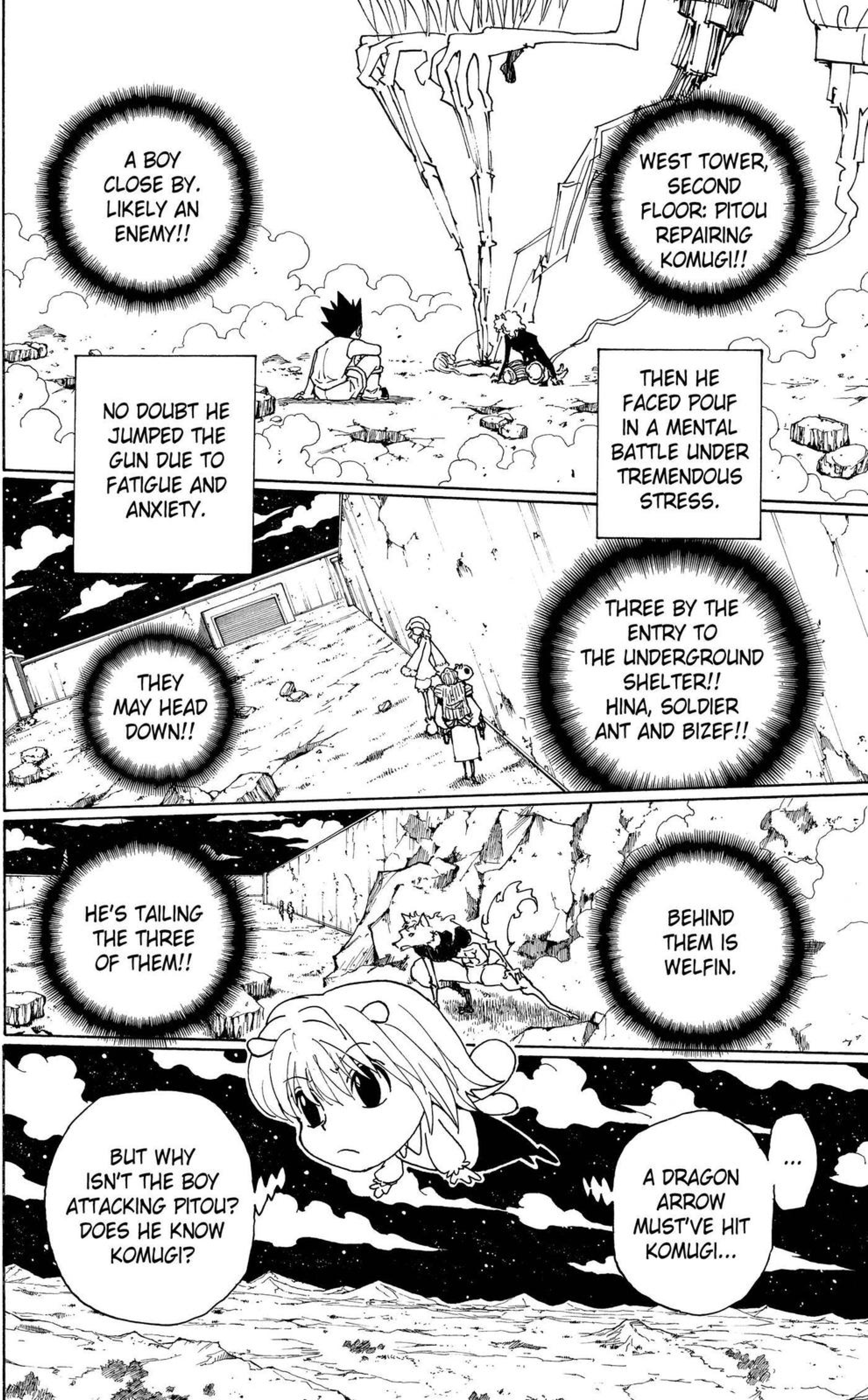

SHOOM
TOSS
PLISH
SO MUCH FOR THE SMOKE MAN!
NOW.
I GET BACK TO THE PALACE, ASSESS THE SITUATION AND FIND THE KING!!

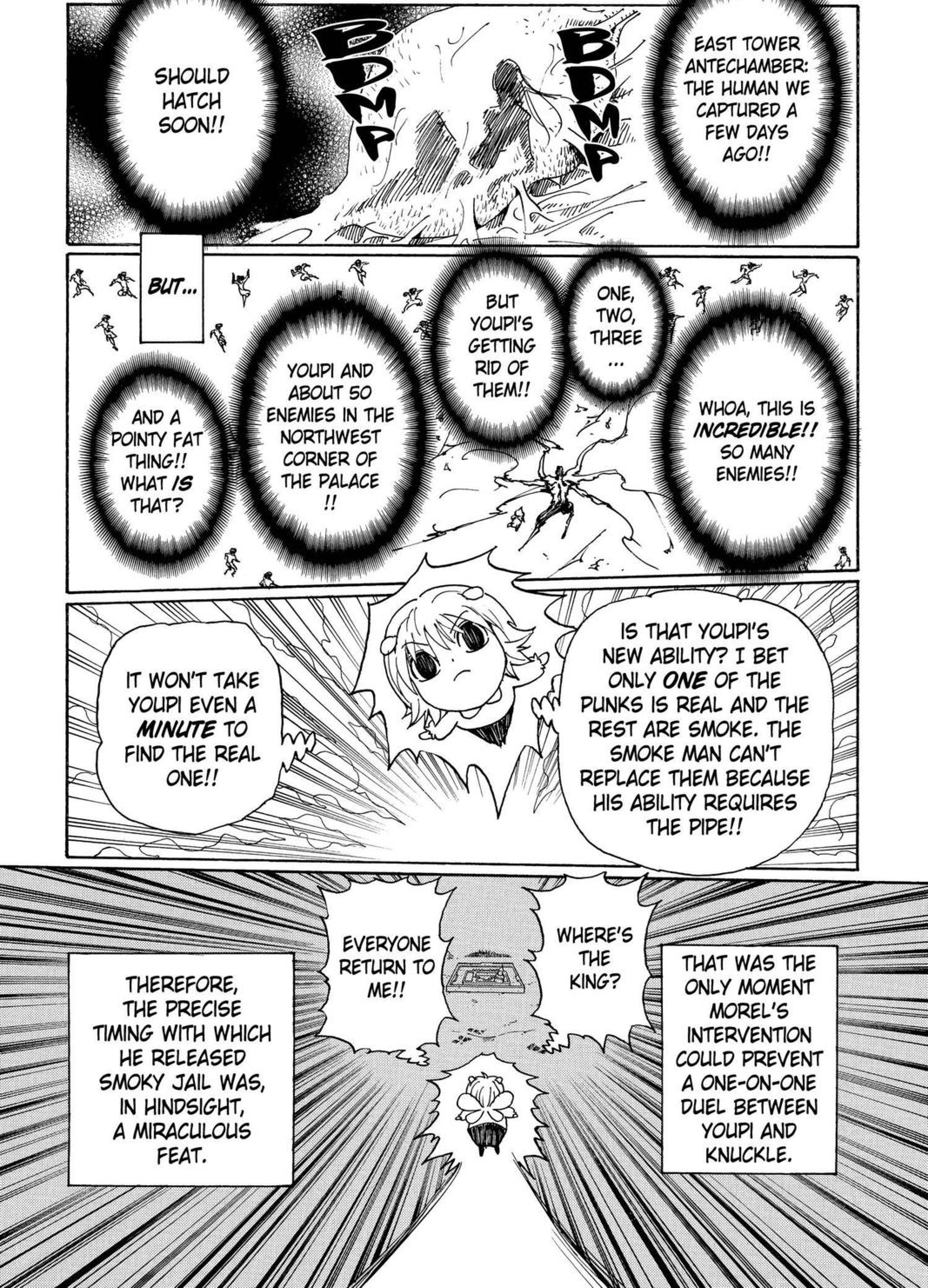

...I'M SURE I'LL JUST BE A BOTHER...
ALTHOUGH IF I'M BY HIS SIDE...
BEELZEBUB, "KING OF FLIES"!!
WSH
ZFF
ZFF
NOW, MY LITTLE SEGMENTS!!
FIND AND EVALUATE EVERY BEING IN THE PALACE!!

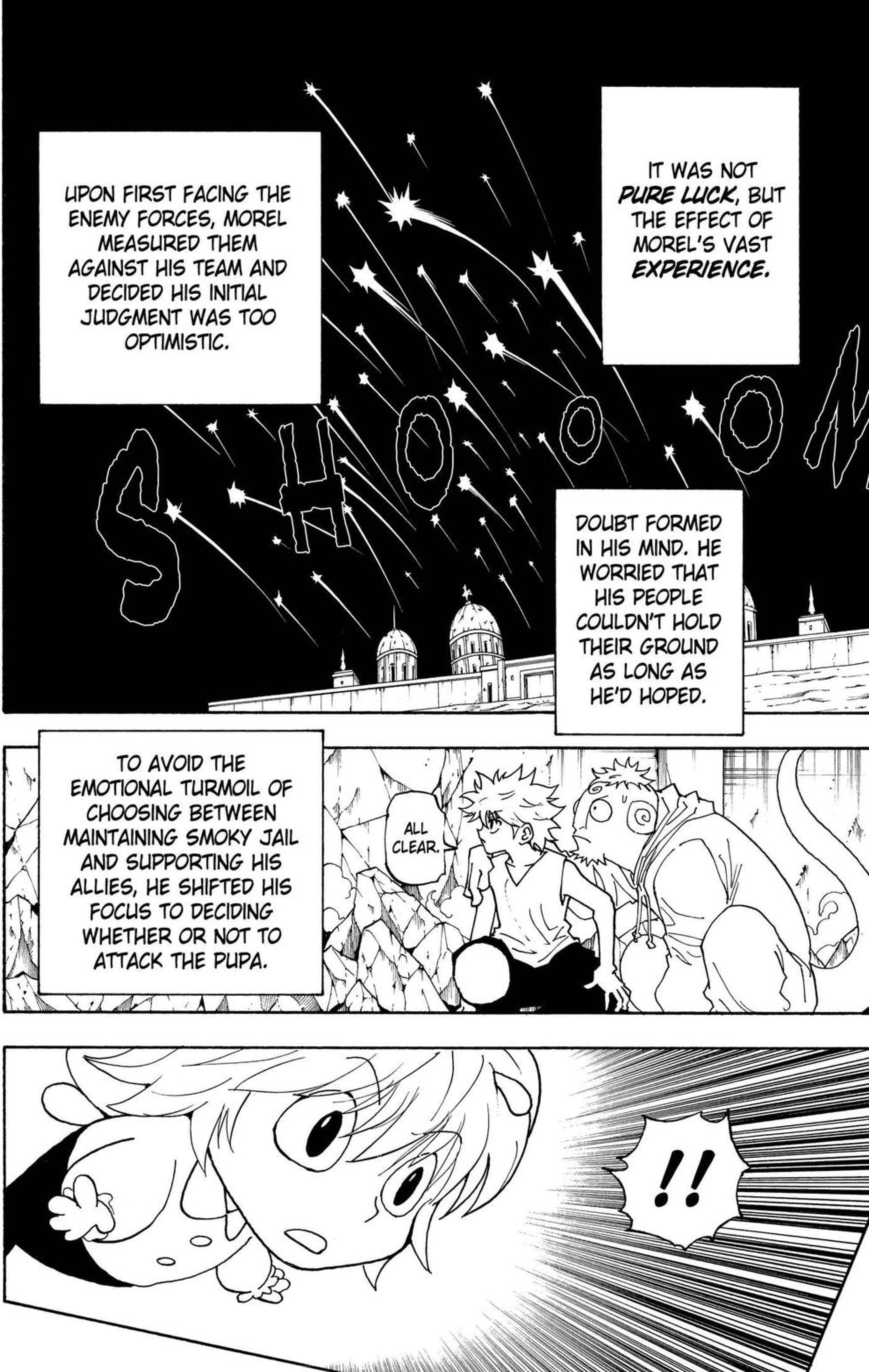

HA HA HA HA HA!!!
SHOOOOM
BEELZEBUB IS POUF'S ABILITY TO SPLIT HIMSELF INTO CLONES, DOWN TO NANO-SIZE AT THE SMALLEST.
HE CAN DIVIDE HIMSELF INTO A VARIETY OF SIZES. THE SMALLER THEY ARE, THE GREATER IN NUMBER THEY CAN BE.
HOWEVER...
...THE CORE, THE COMMAND CENTER, MUST REMAIN AT LEAST THE SIZE OF A BEE.
THIS BIG!


OH, SMOKE MAN... IF YOU HADN'T RELEASED ME...
...I MYSELF WOULD HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO ESCAPE...
...CUTTING MY COMBAT POTENTIAL IN HALF.
EMPTY PUPPETS CAN'T COMPARE TO THE REAL THING.
I'M SURE YOU'RE WELL AWARE OF THAT YOURSELF.
NOW THAT I'M FREE, I'M INVINCIBLE! YOU LOSE!
YOU SHOULD'VE DELIBERATED A LITTLE MORE CAREFULLY.
WHEN YOU REALIZED THE PUPA WAS EMPTY, YOU COULD'VE ASKED YOURSELF WHETHER ITS CONTENTS HAD ESCAPED THE SMOKE!!
EVEN IF I SEEMED TO SPEAK FROM OUTSIDE, YOU COULD'VE PONDERED WHETHER IT WAS MY REAL VOICE!!
THE "PLAN" I DIVULGED TO YOU WAS BASICALLY A SUICIDE MISSION!!
MY DOUBLES COULD'VE CONTINUED TO UNDERMINE YOUR COMRADES, AND SOME MIGHT HAVE BEEN FOOLED, BUT AS LONG AS A FEW WERE AS SKILLED AS YOU...
...EVENTUALLY THEY WOULD'VE REALIZED THAT "I" WAS A FAKE!!


AT THAT POINT, IF YOU STILL HADN'T RELEASED **ME**, THE CORE...
Catch!!
...YOU WOULD'VE FIGURED OUT WHAT MY ABILITY WAS, AND CATCHING ME WOULD'VE BEEN A ***PIECE OF CAKE.***
And Release!! (to hell ☠)
RE-DUCED TO THIS SIZE...
...I'D HAVE BEEN POWERLESS AGAINST YOU.
IF YOU'D KEPT ME IMPRISONED AS PER YOUR INITIAL PLAN, YOU MIGHT HAVE LOST SOME COLLEAGUES...
...BUT IN THE END YOU WOULD HAVE DEFEATED ME.
I WAS ABOUT 10% RESIGNED TO THIS OUTCOME.
THAT'S HOW FORMIDABLE I CONSIDERED YOU.
THAT EXPLOSION MUST'VE SHAKEN YOUR RESOLVE. PITY!
BUT NOW I'M ***FREE*** !!!
NOW TO GET THINGS UNDER CONTROL AT THE PALACE!!!
MOREL WAS IN FAR FROM PERFECT FORM EVEN ***BEFORE*** THE STORMING OF THE PALACE.


WEST TOWER, SECOND FLOOR: PITOU REPAIRING KOMUGI!!
A BOY CLOSE BY. LIKELY AN ENEMY!!
THEN HE FACED POUF IN A MENTAL BATTLE UNDER TREMENDOUS STRESS.
NO DOUBT HE JUMPED THE GUN DUE TO FATIGUE AND ANXIETY.
THREE BY THE ENTRY TO THE UNDERGROUND SHELTER!! HINA, SOLDIER ANT AND BIZEF!!
THEY MAY HEAD DOWN!!
BEHIND THEM IS WELFIN.
HE'S TAILING THE THREE OF THEM!!
...
A DRAGON ARROW MUST'VE HIT KOMUGI...
BUT WHY ISN'T THE BOY ATTACKING PITOU? DOES HE KNOW KOMUGI?


EAST TOWER ANTECHAMBER: THE HUMAN WE CAPTURED A FEW DAYS AGO!!
BDMP
BDMP
SHOULD HATCH SOON!!
BUT...
WHOA, THIS IS *INCREDIBLE!!* SO MANY ENEMIES!!
ONE, TWO, THREE ...
BUT YOUPI'S GETTING RID OF THEM!!
YOUPI AND ABOUT 50 ENEMIES IN THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF THE PALACE !!
AND A POINTY FAT THING!! WHAT *IS* THAT?
IS THAT YOUPI'S NEW ABILITY? I BET ONLY *ONE* OF THE PUNKS IS REAL AND THE REST ARE SMOKE. THE SMOKE MAN CAN'T REPLACE THEM BECAUSE HIS ABILITY REQUIRES THE PIPE!!
IT WON'T TAKE YOUPI EVEN A *MINUTE* TO FIND THE REAL ONE!!
THAT WAS THE ONLY MOMENT MOREL'S INTERVENTION COULD PREVENT A ONE-ON-ONE DUEL BETWEEN YOUPI AND KNUCKLE.
WHERE'S THE KING?
EVERYONE RETURN TO ME!!
THEREFORE, THE PRECISE TIMING WITH WHICH HE RELEASED SMOKY JAIL WAS, IN HINDSIGHT, A MIRACULOUS FEAT.

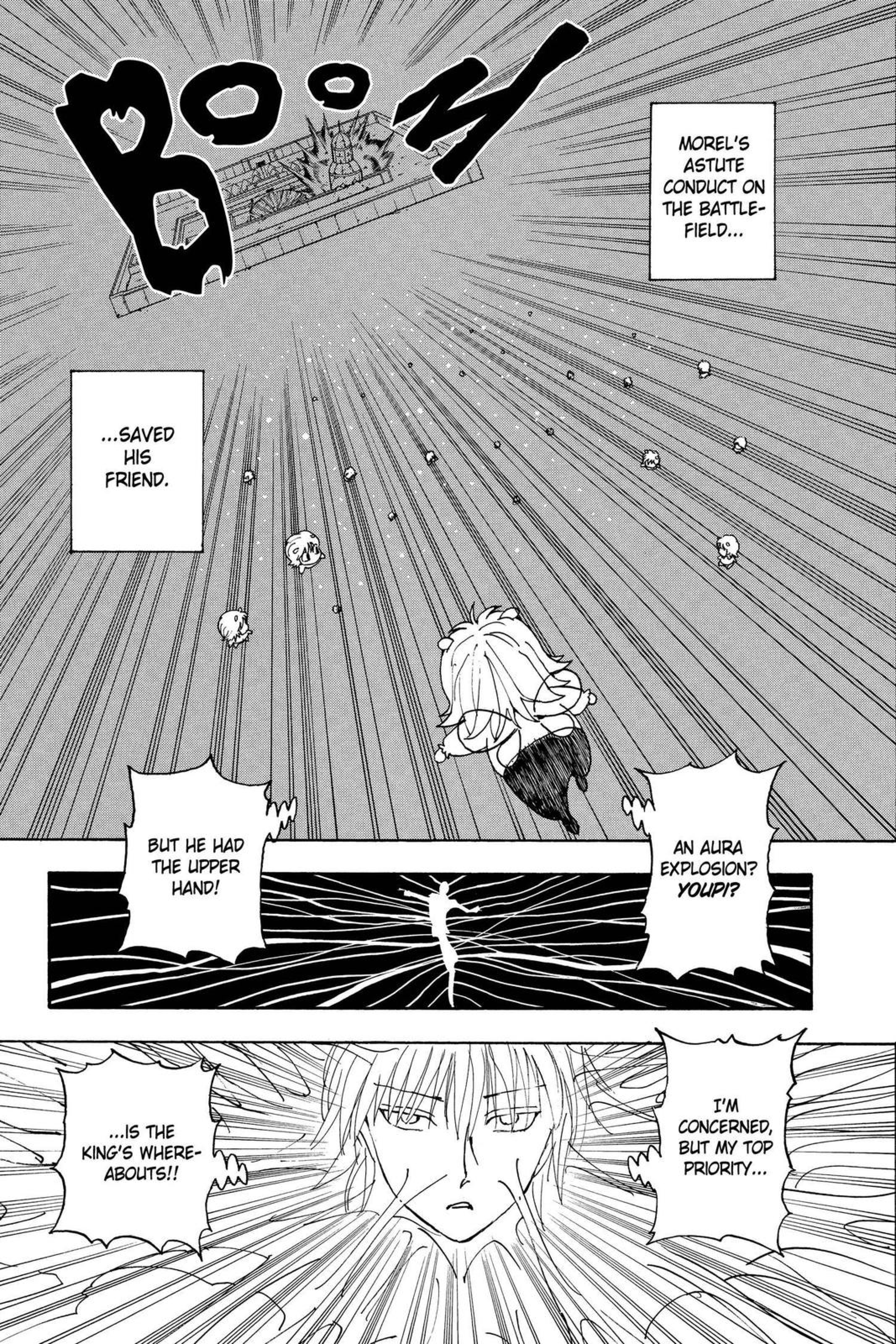


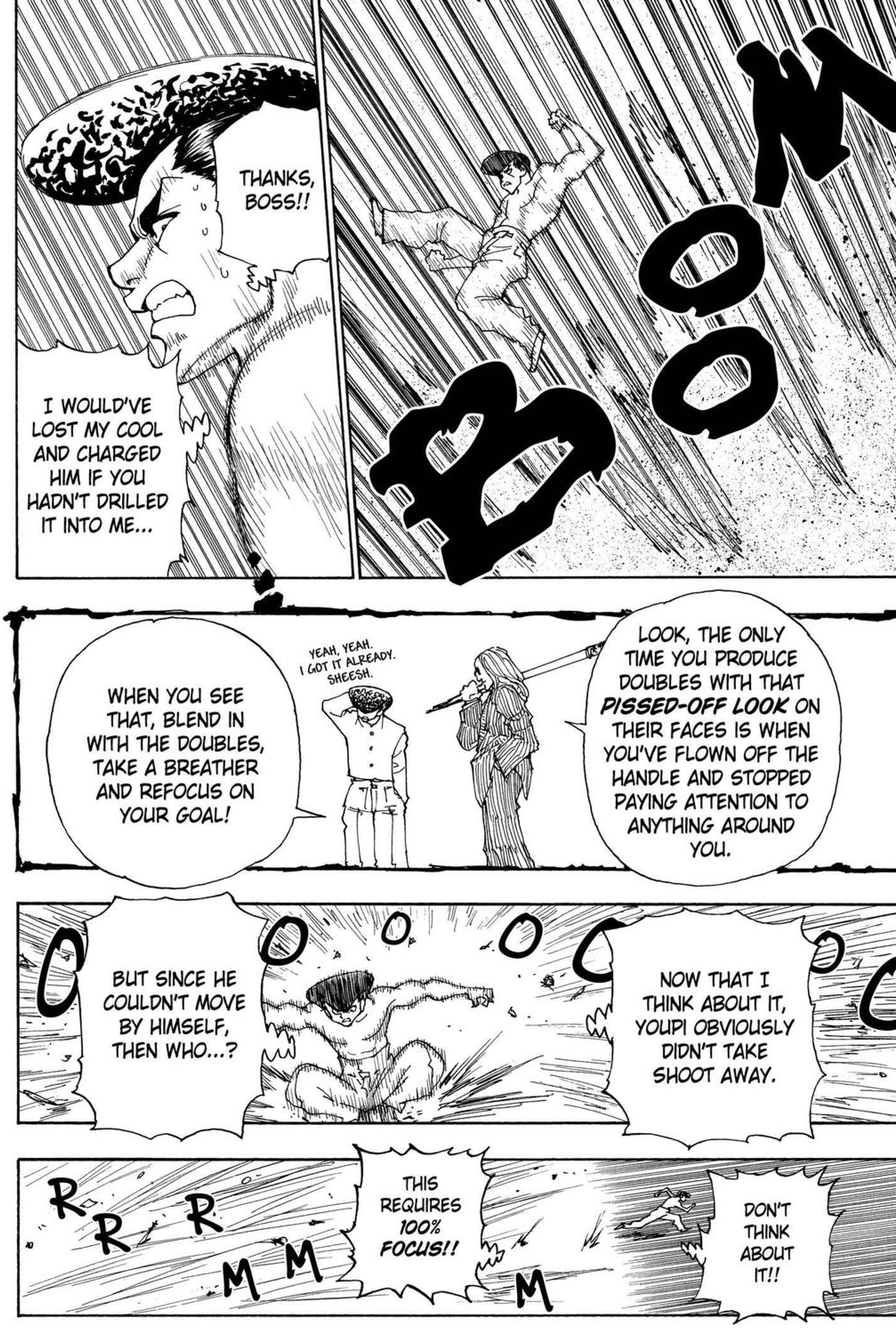
UPON FIRST FACING THE ENEMY FORCES, MOREL MEASURED THEM AGAINST HIS TEAM AND DECIDED HIS INITIAL JUDGMENT WAS TOO OPTIMISTIC.

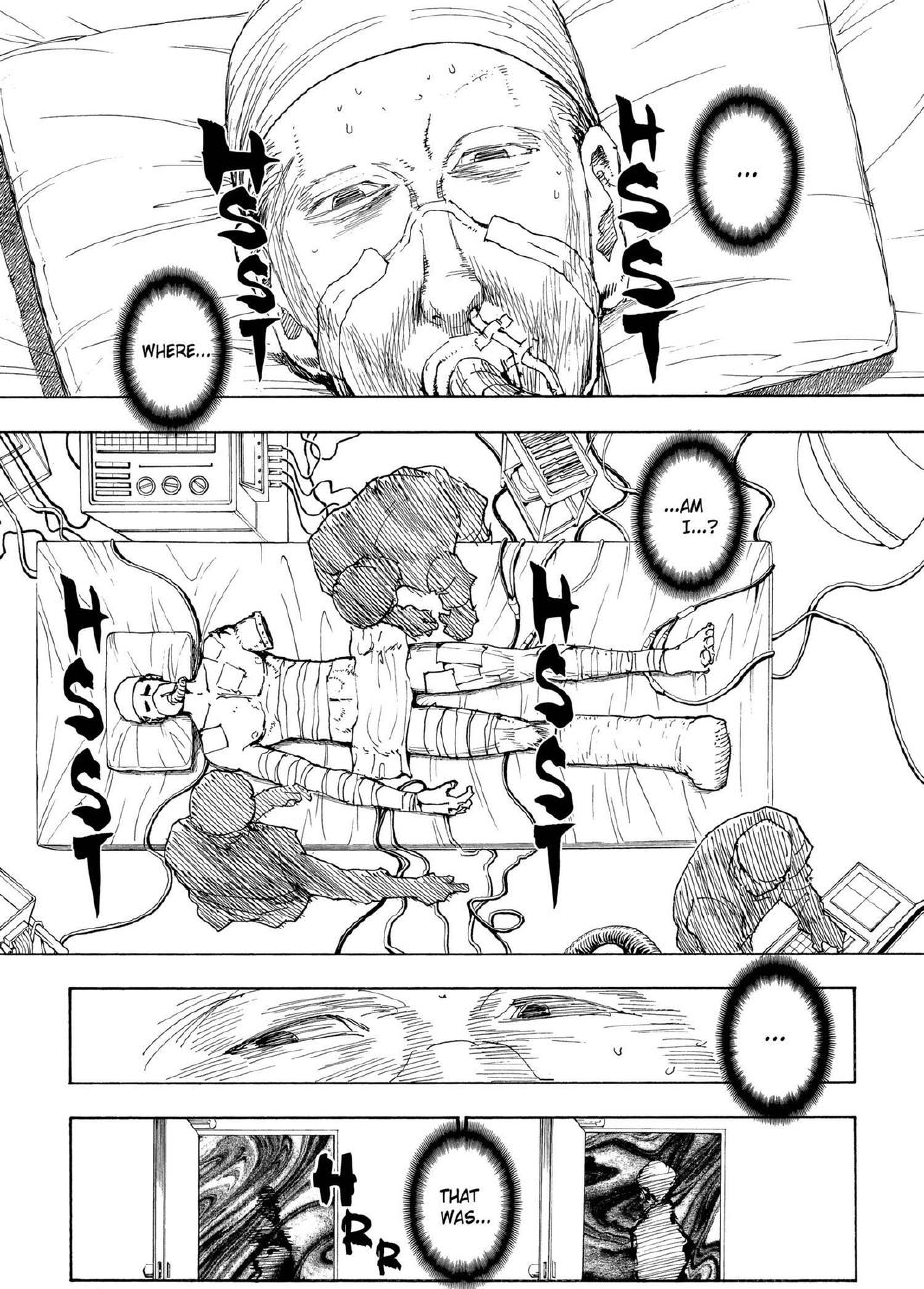
IT WAS NOT ***PURE LUCK***, BUT THE EFFECT OF MOREL'S VAST ***EXPERIENCE.***

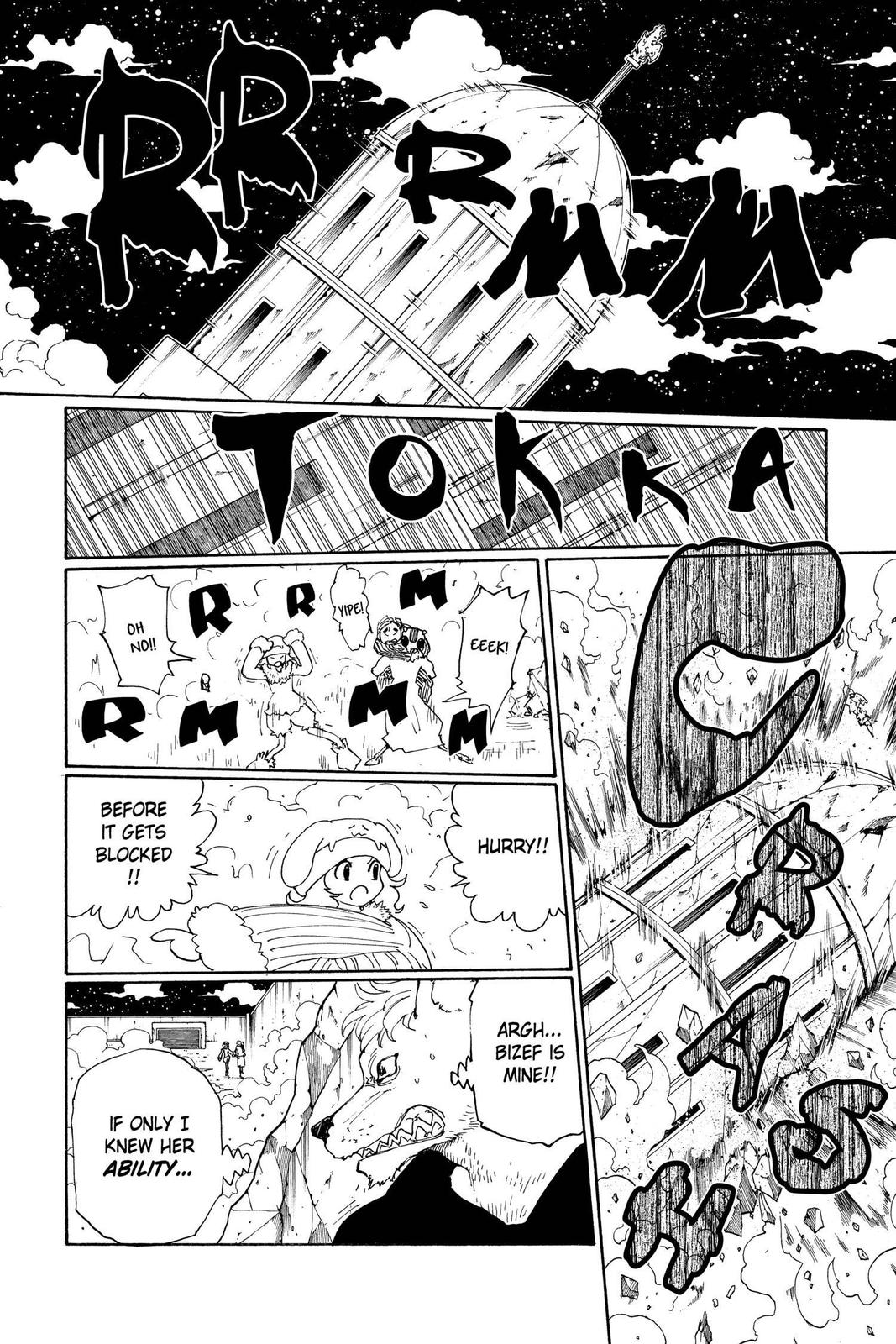
DOUBT FORMED IN HIS MIND. HE WORRIED THAT HIS PEOPLE COULDN'T HOLD THEIR GROUND AS LONG AS HE'D HOPED.

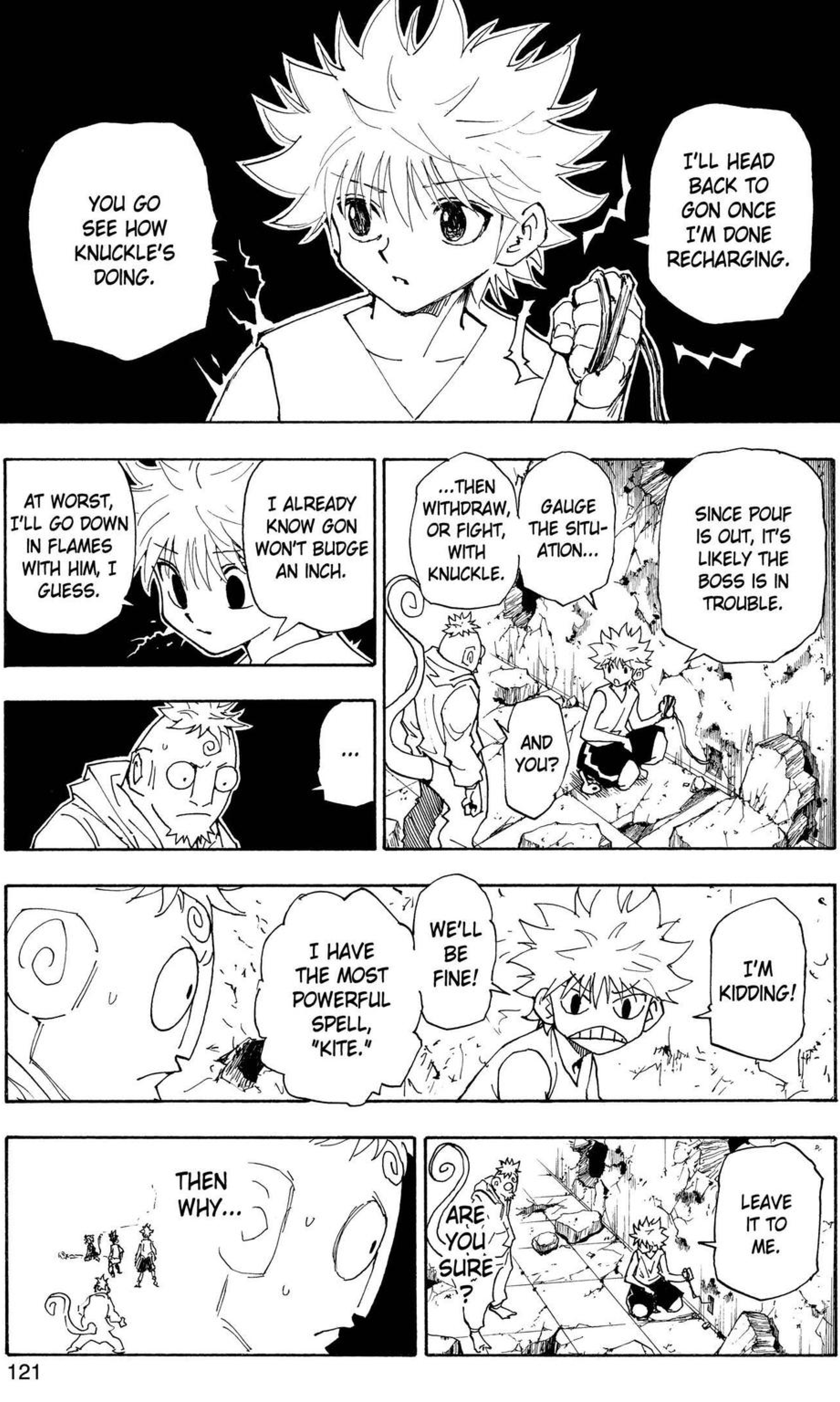
TO AVOID THE EMOTIONAL TURMOIL OF CHOOSING BETWEEN MAINTAINING SMOKY JAIL AND SUPPORTING HIS ALLIES, HE SHIFTED HIS FOCUS TO DECIDING WHETHER OR NOT TO ATTACK THE PUPA.

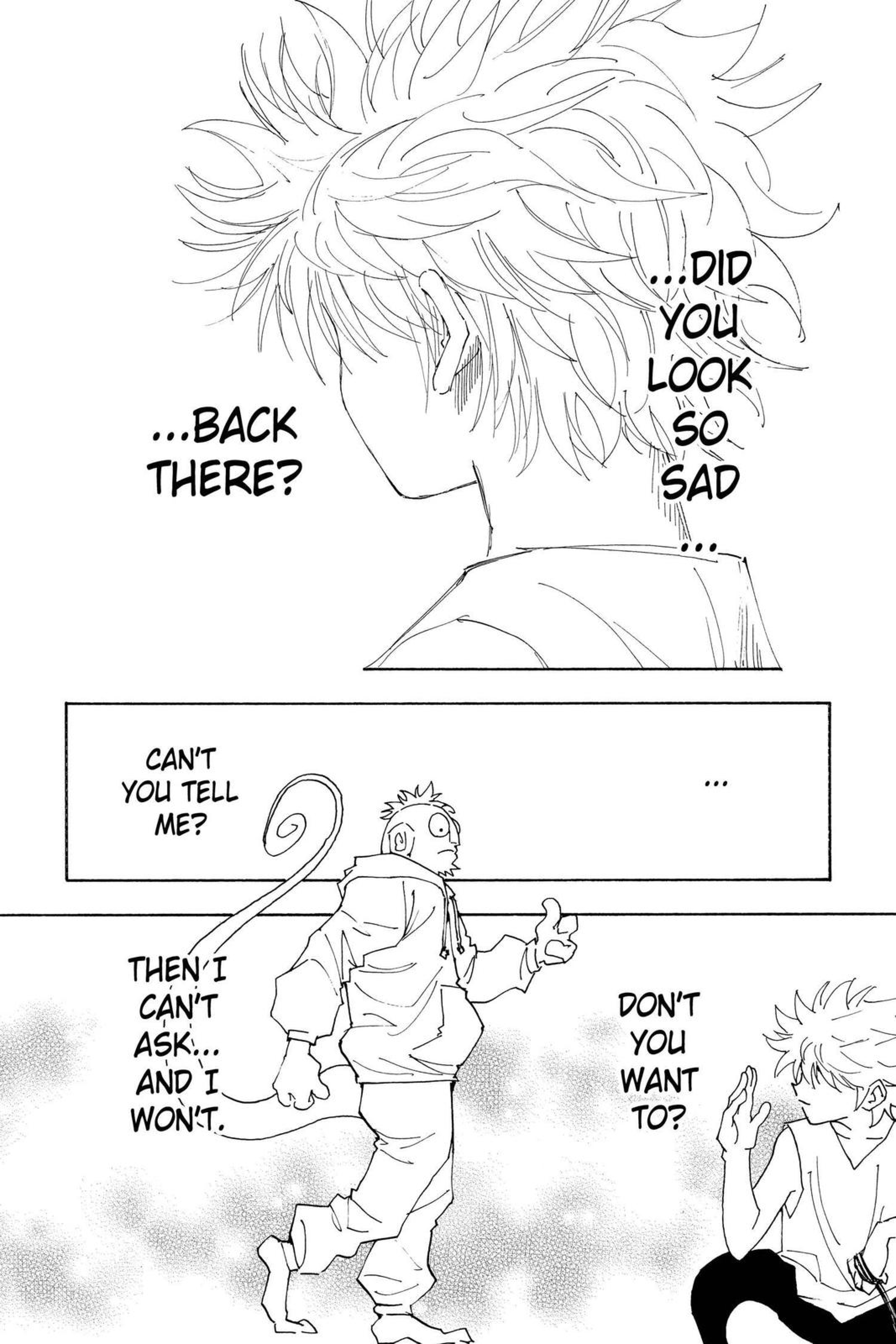

BOOM
MOREL'S ASTUTE CONDUCT ON THE BATTLEFIELD...
...SAVED HIS FRIEND.
AN AURA EXPLOSION? *YOUPI?*
BUT HE HAD THE UPPER HAND!
I'M CONCERNED, BUT MY TOP PRIORITY...
...IS THE KING'S WHEREABOUTS!!

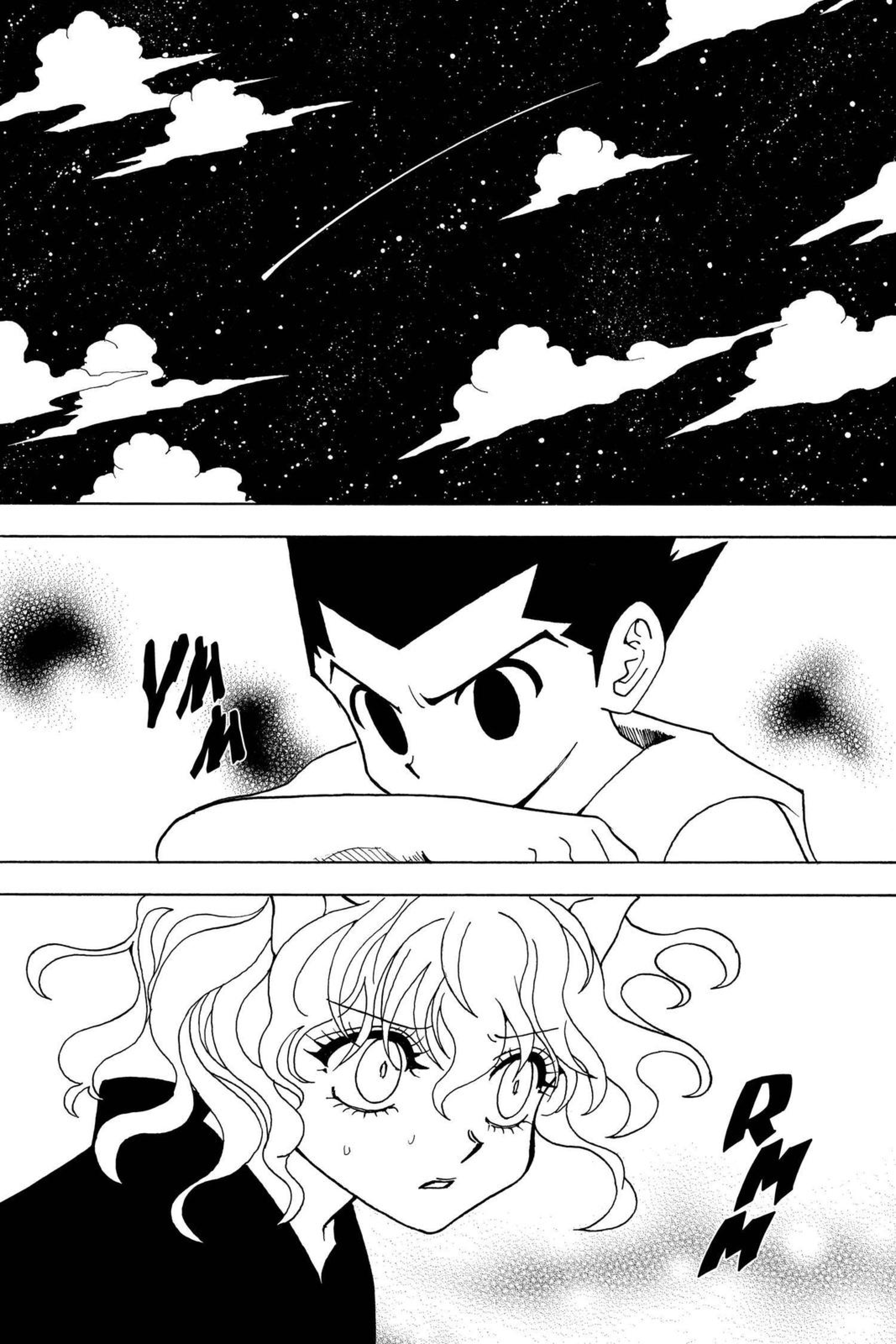

BOOOM
THANKS, BOSS!!
I WOULD'VE LOST MY COOL AND CHARGED HIM IF YOU HADN'T DRILLED IT INTO ME...
LOOK, THE ONLY TIME YOU PRODUCE DOUBLES WITH THAT ***PISSED-OFF LOOK*** ON THEIR FACES IS WHEN YOU'VE FLOWN OFF THE HANDLE AND STOPPED PAYING ATTENTION TO ANYTHING AROUND YOU.
YEAH, YEAH. I GOT IT ALREADY. SHEESH.
WHEN YOU SEE THAT, BLEND IN WITH THE DOUBLES, TAKE A BREATHER AND REFOCUS ON YOUR GOAL!
OOOOOOOO
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, YOUPI OBVIOUSLY DIDN'T TAKE SHOOT AWAY.
BUT SINCE HE COULDN'T MOVE BY HIMSELF, THEN WHO...?
DON'T THINK ABOUT IT!!
THIS REQUIRES *100%* ***FOCUS!!***
RRRMMM

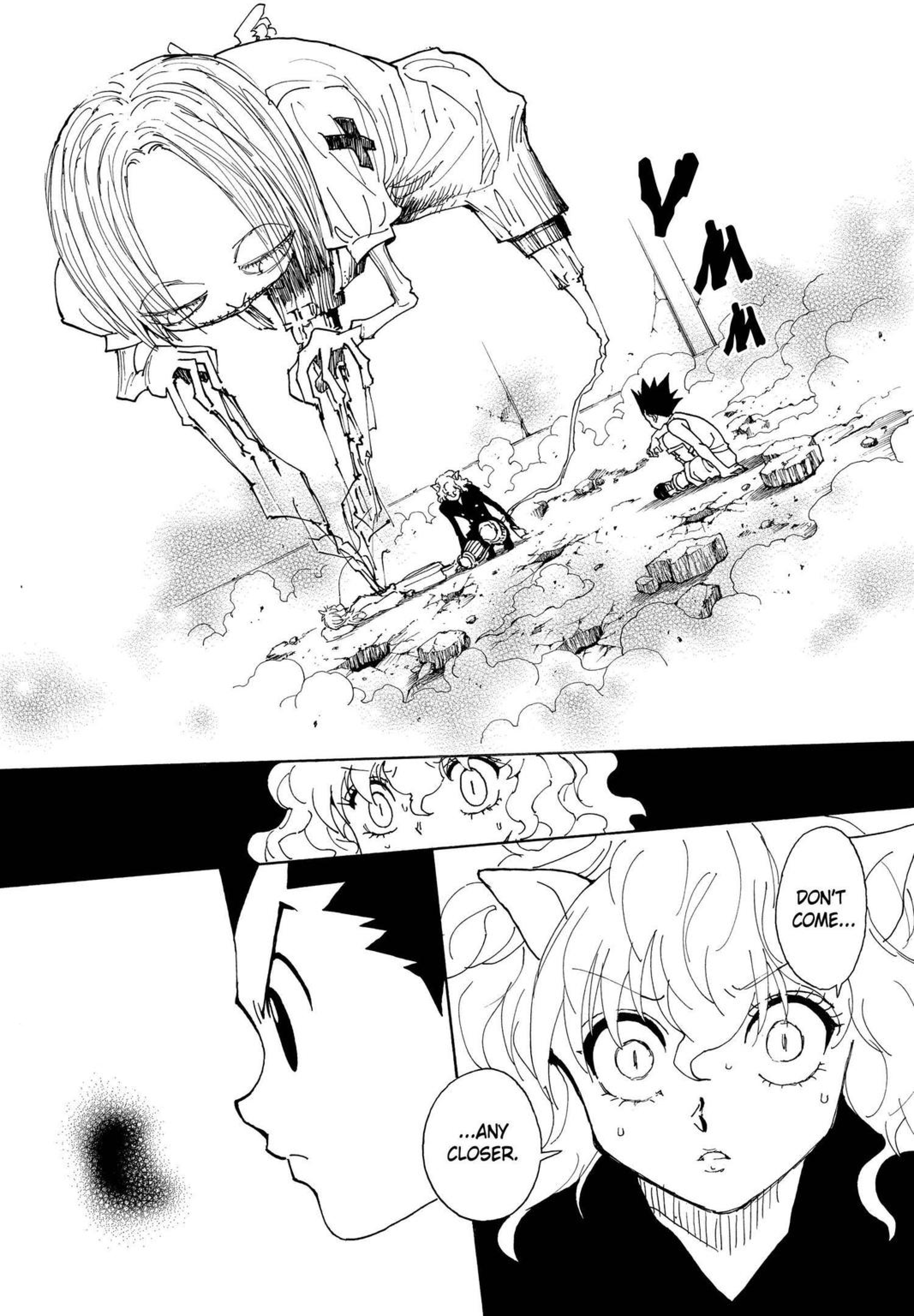

...
HSST
HSST
WHERE...
...AM I...?
HSST
HSST
...
THAT WAS...
HRR

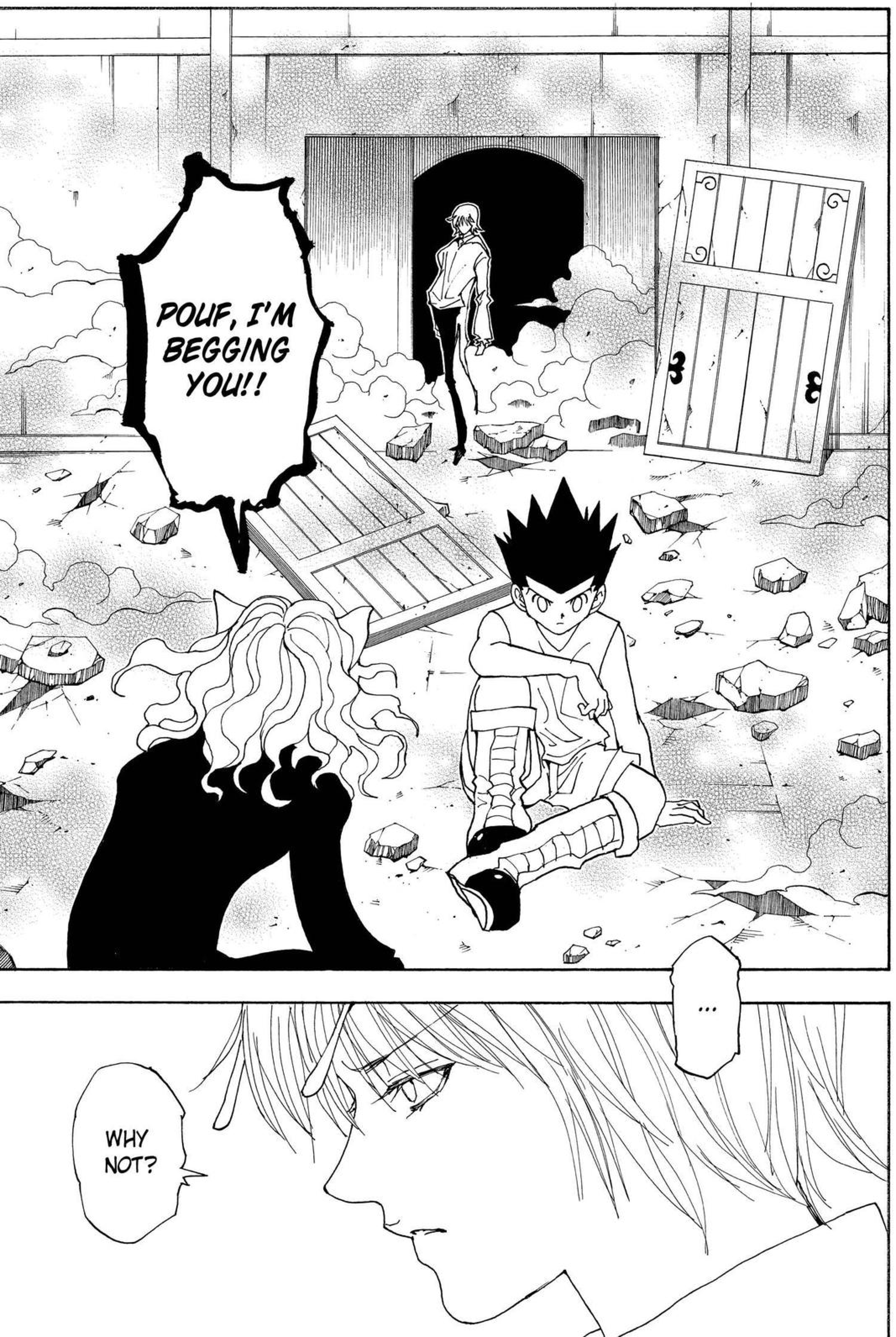

RRRMMM
TOKKA
CRASH
RRMRMMMM
EEEK!
YIPE!
OH NO!!
HURRY!!
BEFORE IT GETS BLOCKED!!
ARGH... BIZEF IS MINE!!
IF ONLY I KNEW HER *ABILITY*...

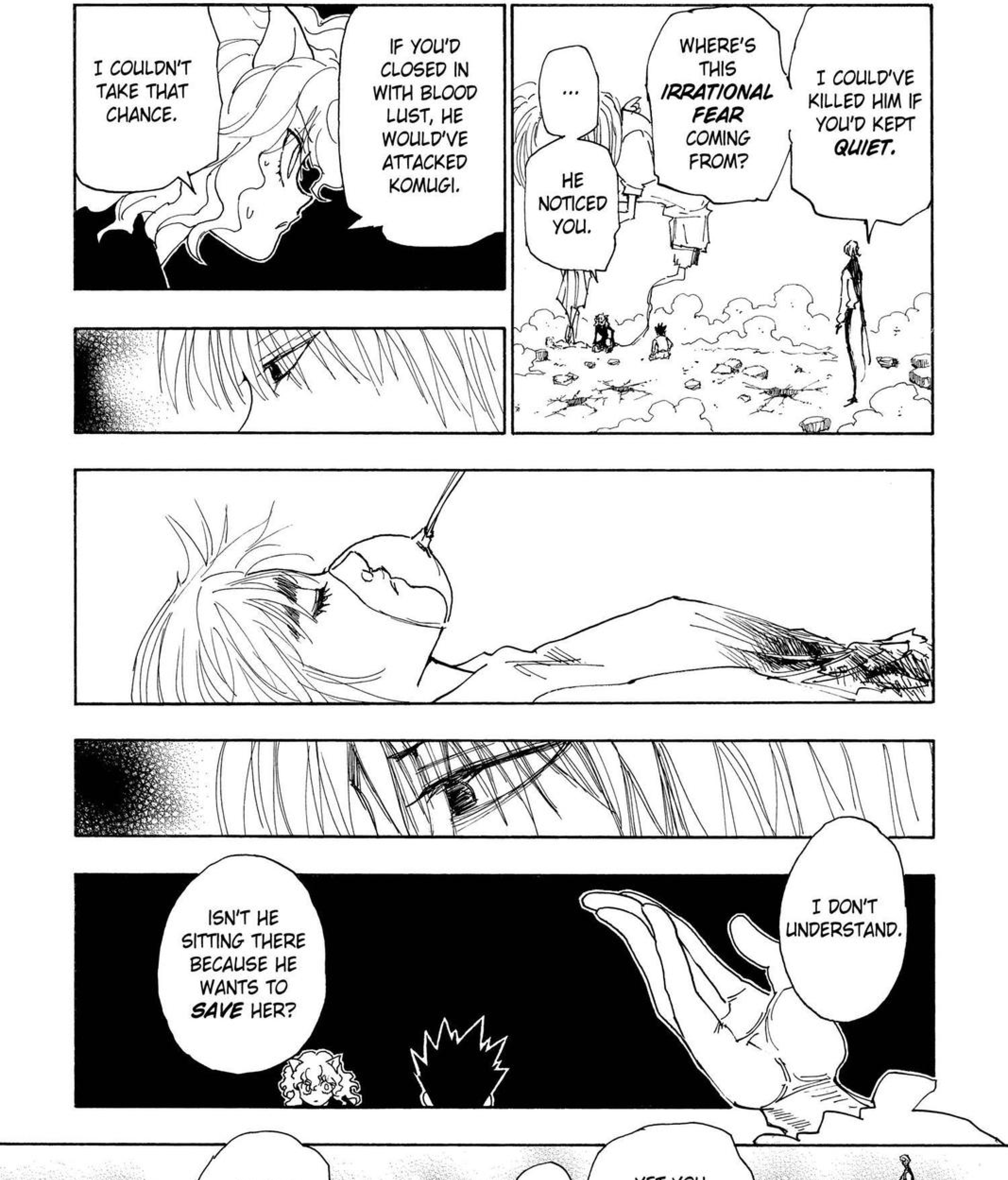

I'LL HEAD BACK TO GON ONCE I'M DONE RECHARGING.
YOU GO SEE HOW KNUCKLE'S DOING.
SINCE POUF IS OUT, IT'S LIKELY THE BOSS IS IN TROUBLE.
GAUGE THE SITUATION...
...THEN WITHDRAW, OR FIGHT, WITH KNUCKLE.
AND YOU?
I ALREADY KNOW GON WON'T BUDGE AN INCH.
AT WORST, I'LL GO DOWN IN FLAMES WITH HIM, I GUESS.
...
I'M KIDDING!
WE'LL BE FINE!
I HAVE THE MOST POWERFUL SPELL, "KITE."
LEAVE IT TO ME.
ARE YOU SURE?
THEN WHY...


...DID YOU LOOK SO SAD...
...BACK THERE?
...
CAN'T YOU TELL ME?
DON'T YOU WANT TO?
THEN I CAN'T ASK... AND I WON'T.

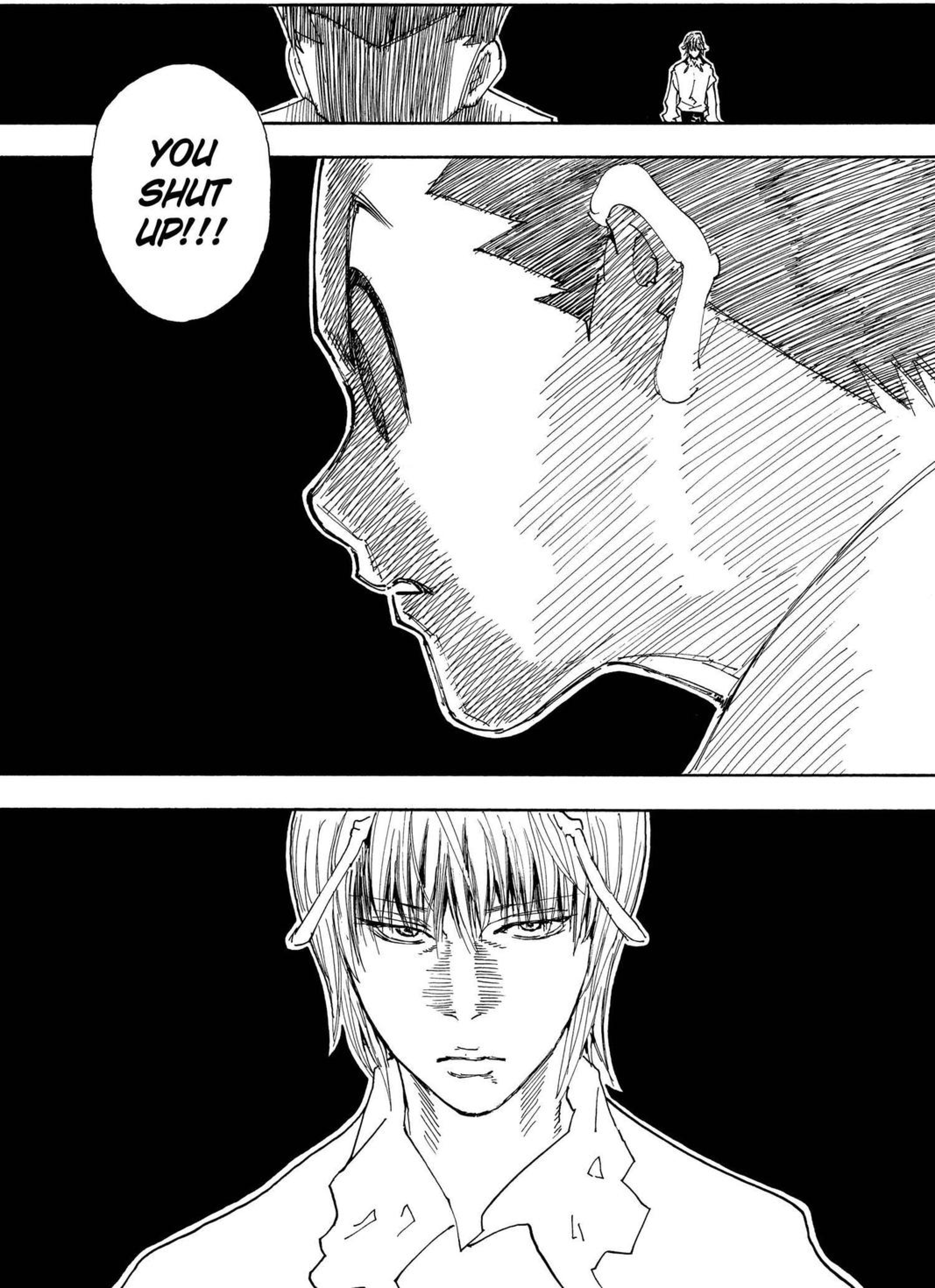

VMM
RMM


VMMM
DON'T COME...
...ANY CLOSER.

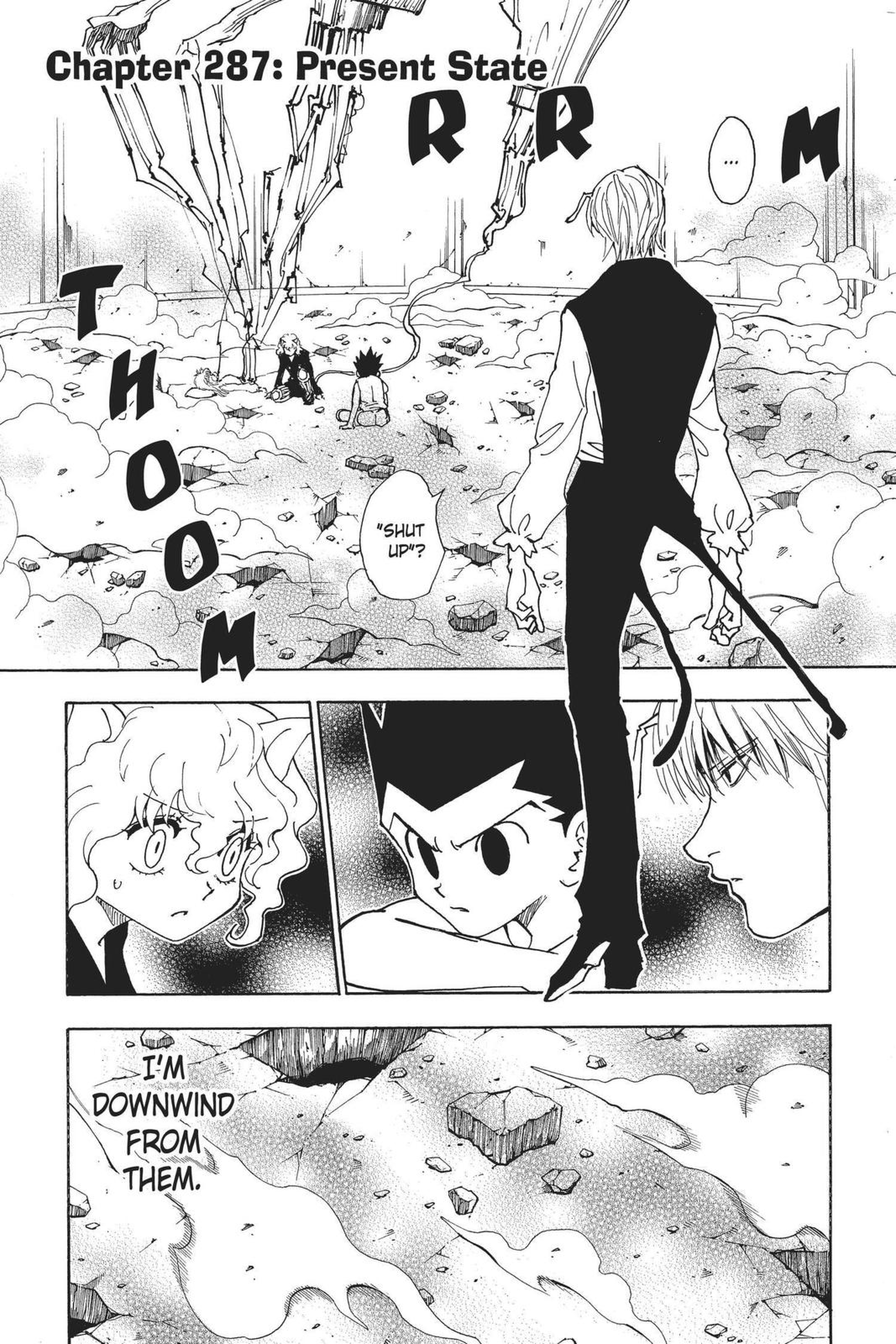

POUF, I'M BEGGING YOU!!
...
WHY NOT?

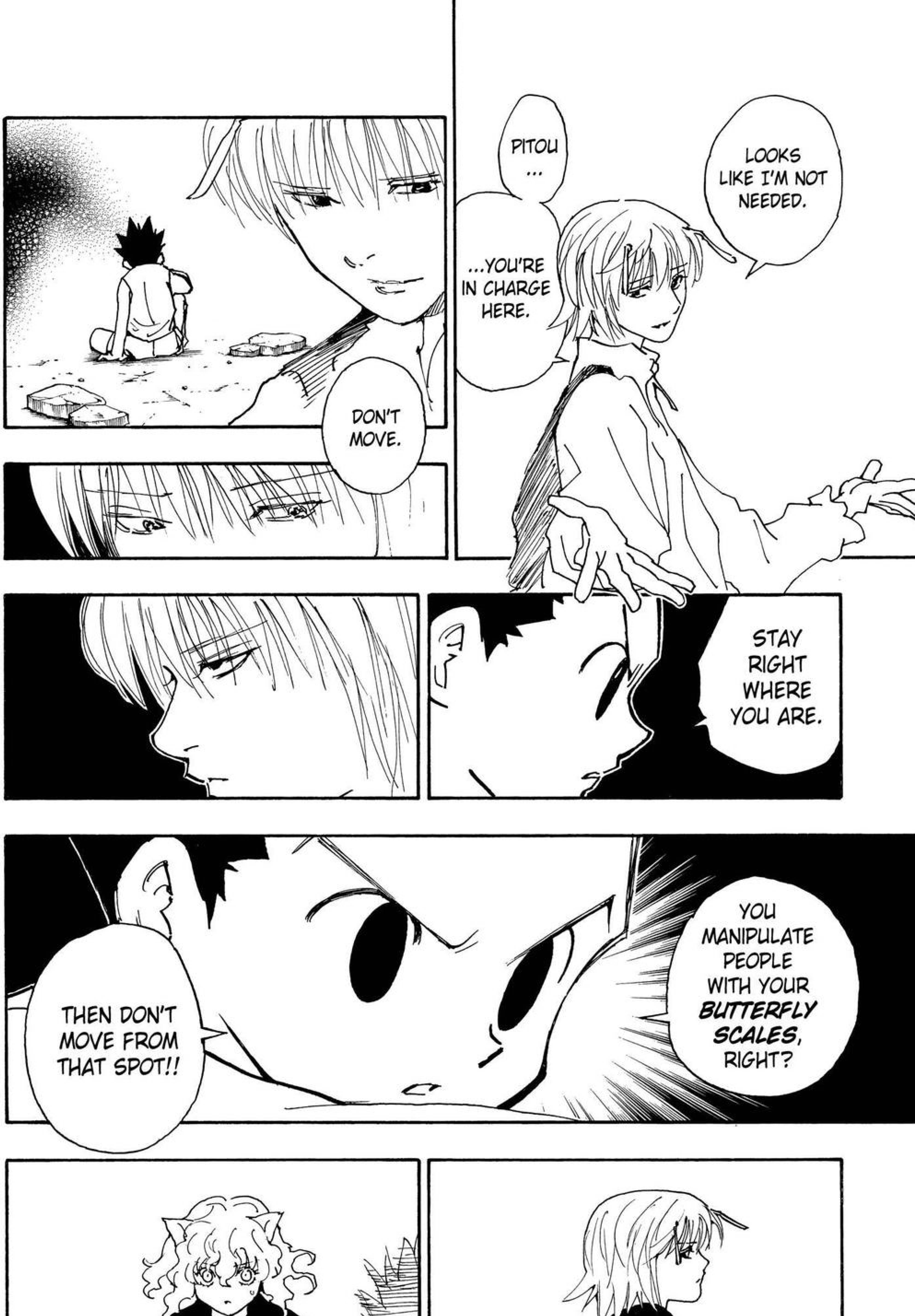

I COULD'VE KILLED HIM IF YOU'D KEPT **QUIET.**
WHERE'S THIS ***IRRATIONAL FEAR*** COMING FROM?
...
HE NOTICED YOU.
IF YOU'D CLOSED IN WITH BLOOD LUST, HE WOULD'VE ATTACKED KOMUGI.
I COULDN'T TAKE THAT CHANCE.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
ISN'T HE SITTING THERE BECAUSE HE WANTS TO ***SAVE*** HER?
YET YOU TALK AS IF HE WOULD ***BRING HARM*** TO HER...
WHY—
IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU.

« READ THIS WAY «

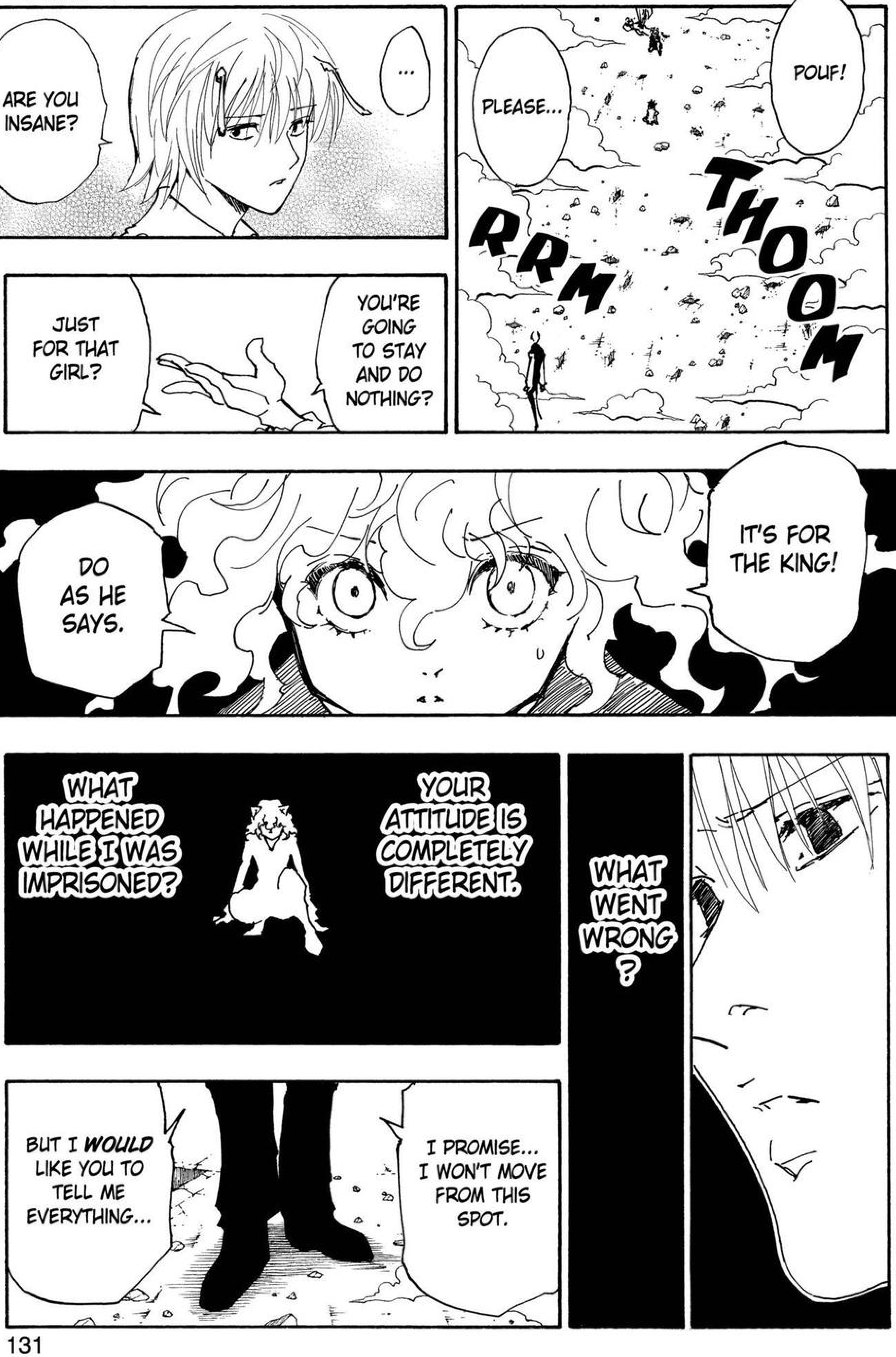


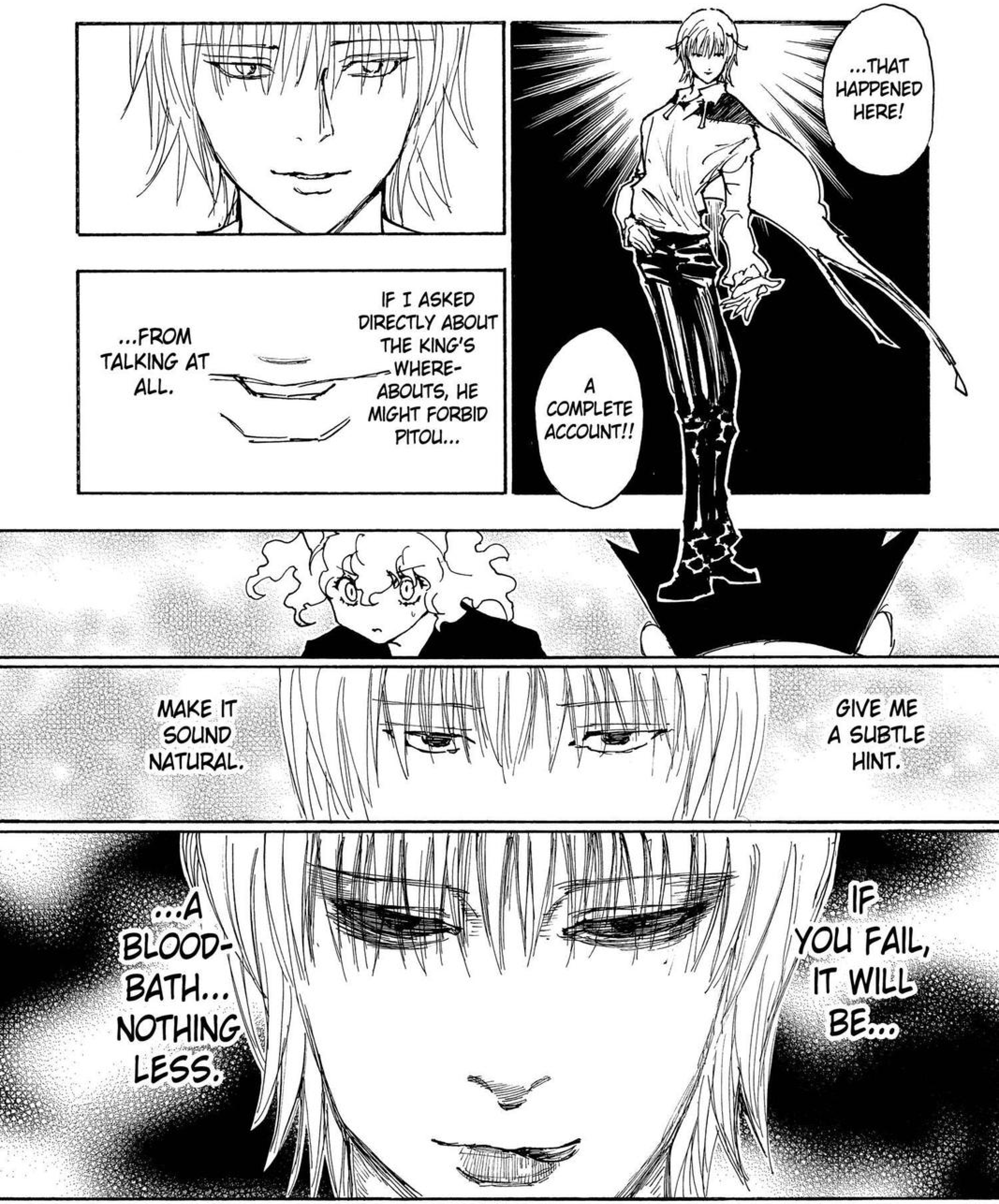
Chapter 287: Present State


RRROM
…
THOOM
"SHUT UP"?
I'M DOWNWIND FROM THEM.

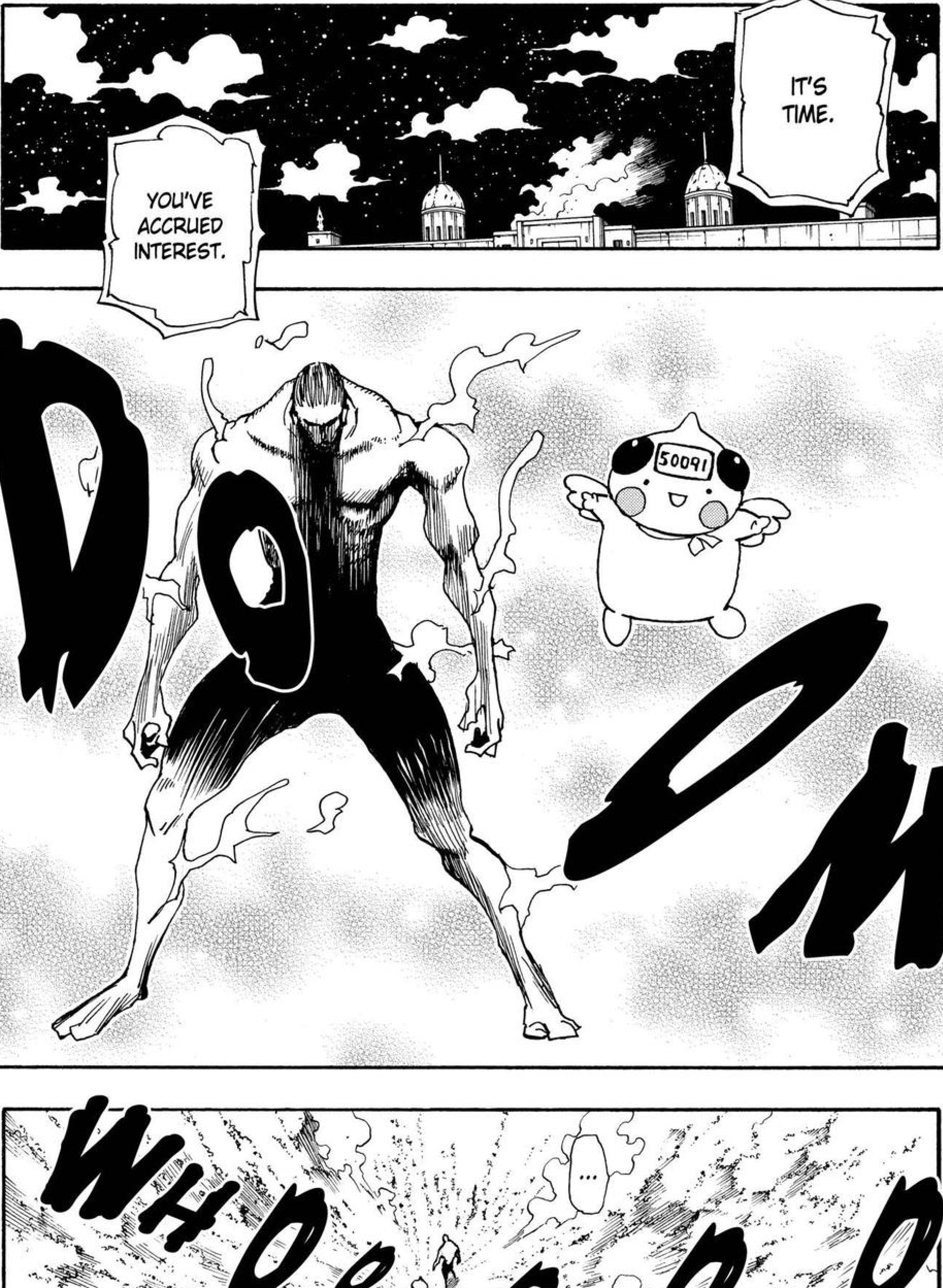

LOOKS LIKE I'M NOT NEEDED.
PITOU ...
...YOU'RE IN CHARGE HERE.
DON'T MOVE.
STAY RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE.
YOU MANIPULATE PEOPLE WITH YOUR **BUTTERFLY SCALES**, RIGHT?
THEN DON'T MOVE FROM THAT SPOT!!

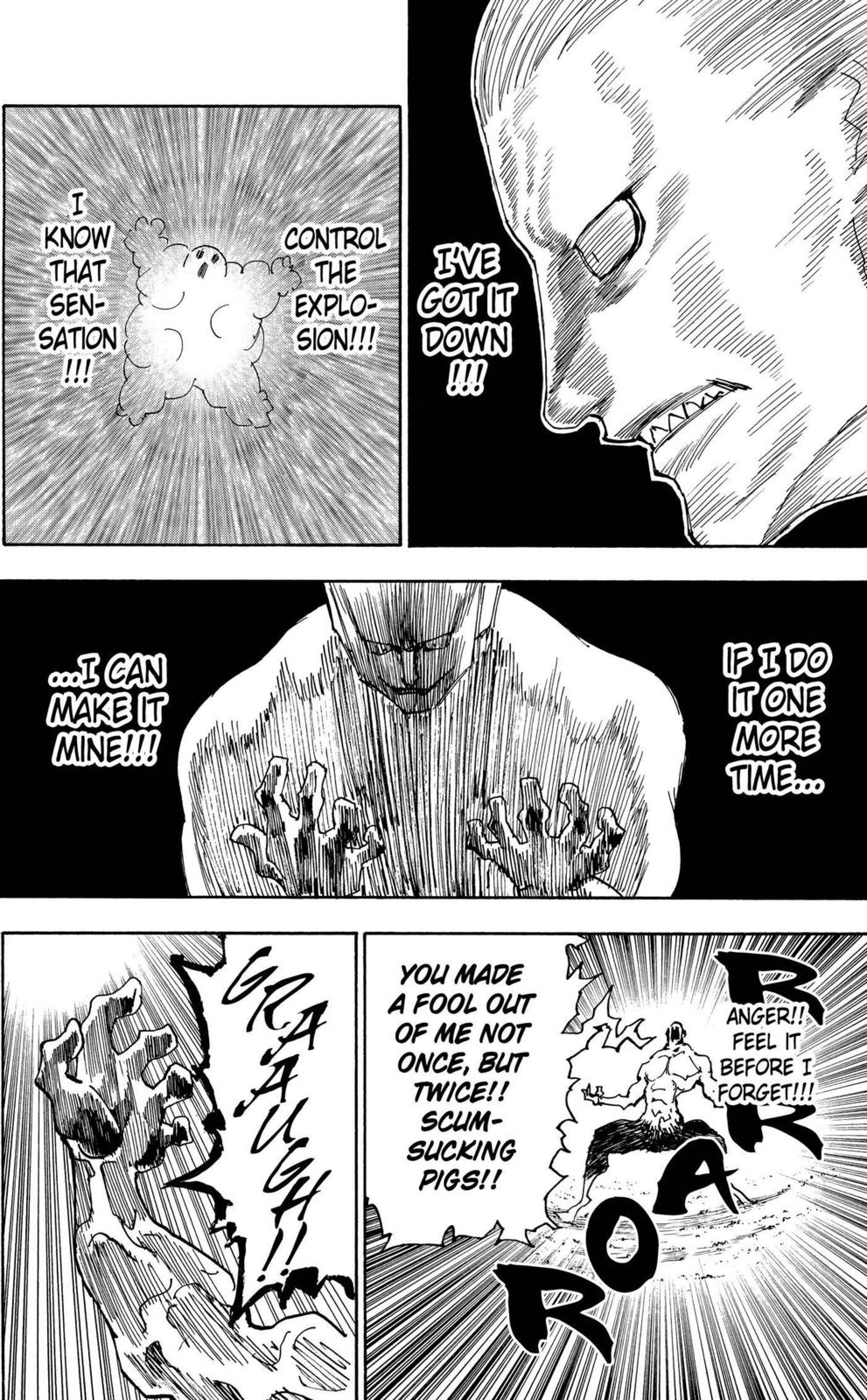
READ THIS WAY

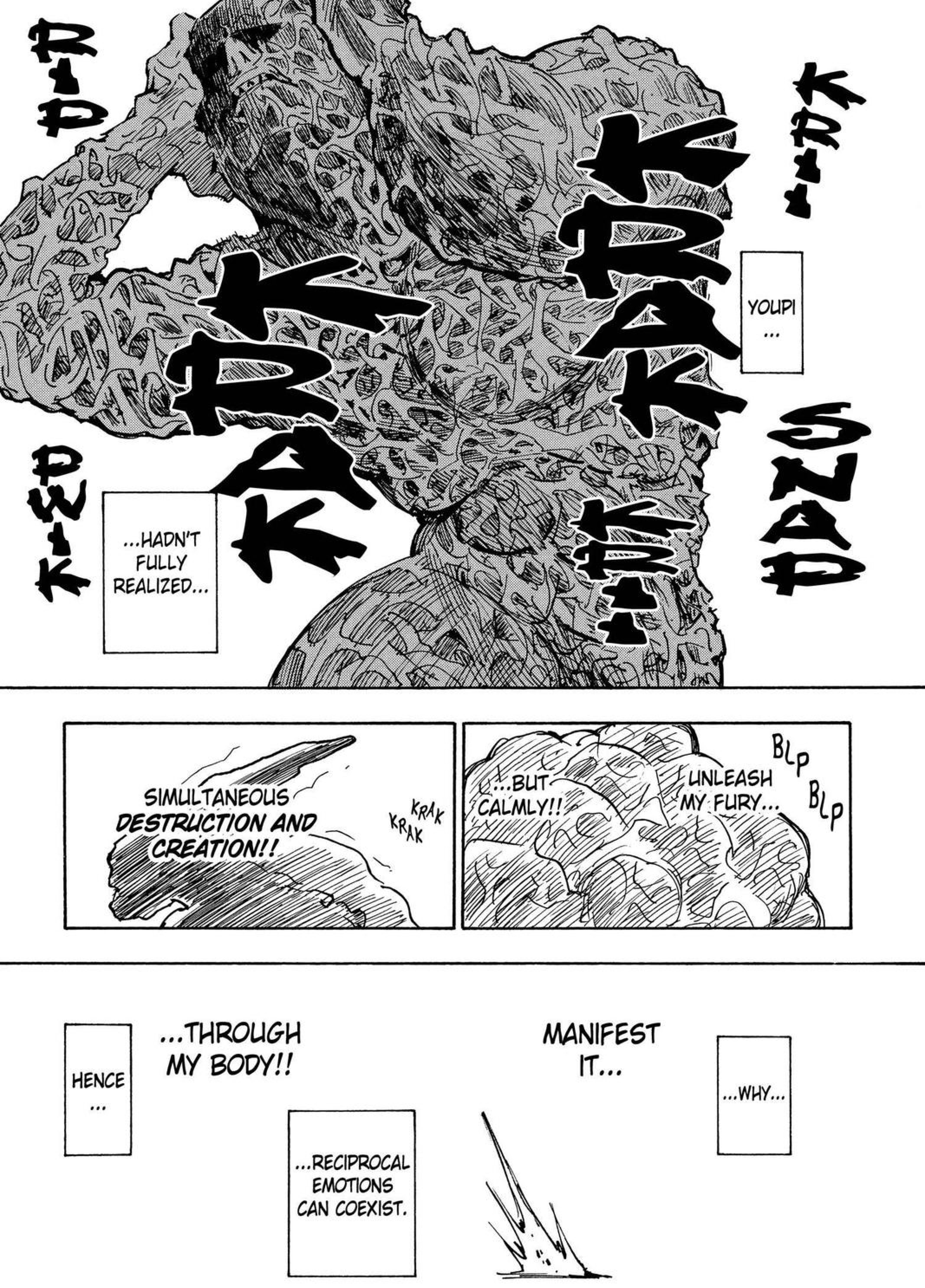

POUF!
PLEASE...
THOOM
RRRM
...
ARE YOU INSANE?
YOU'RE GOING TO STAY AND DO NOTHING?
JUST FOR THAT GIRL?
IT'S FOR THE KING!
DO AS HE SAYS.
WHAT WENT WRONG?
YOUR ATTITUDE IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.
WHAT HAPPENED WHILE I WAS IMPRISONED?
I PROMISE... I WON'T MOVE FROM THIS SPOT.
BUT I *WOULD* LIKE YOU TO TELL ME EVERYTHING...

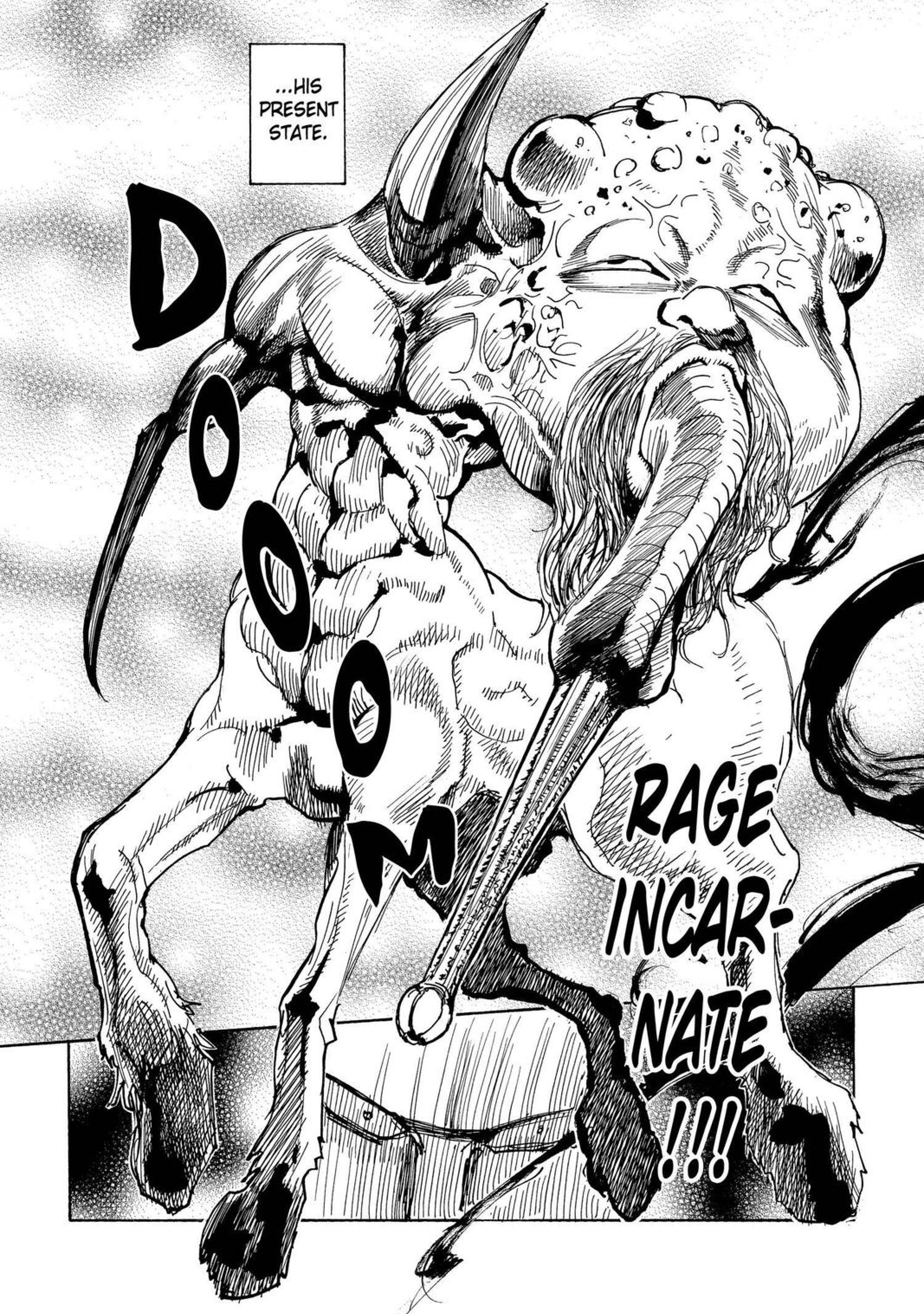

...THAT HAPPENED HERE!
A COMPLETE ACCOUNT!!
IF I ASKED DIRECTLY ABOUT THE KING'S WHEREABOUTS, HE MIGHT FORBID PITOU...
...FROM TALKING AT ALL.
GIVE ME A SUBTLE HINT.
MAKE IT SOUND NATURAL.
IF YOU FAIL, IT WILL BE...
...A BLOODBATH... NOTHING LESS.

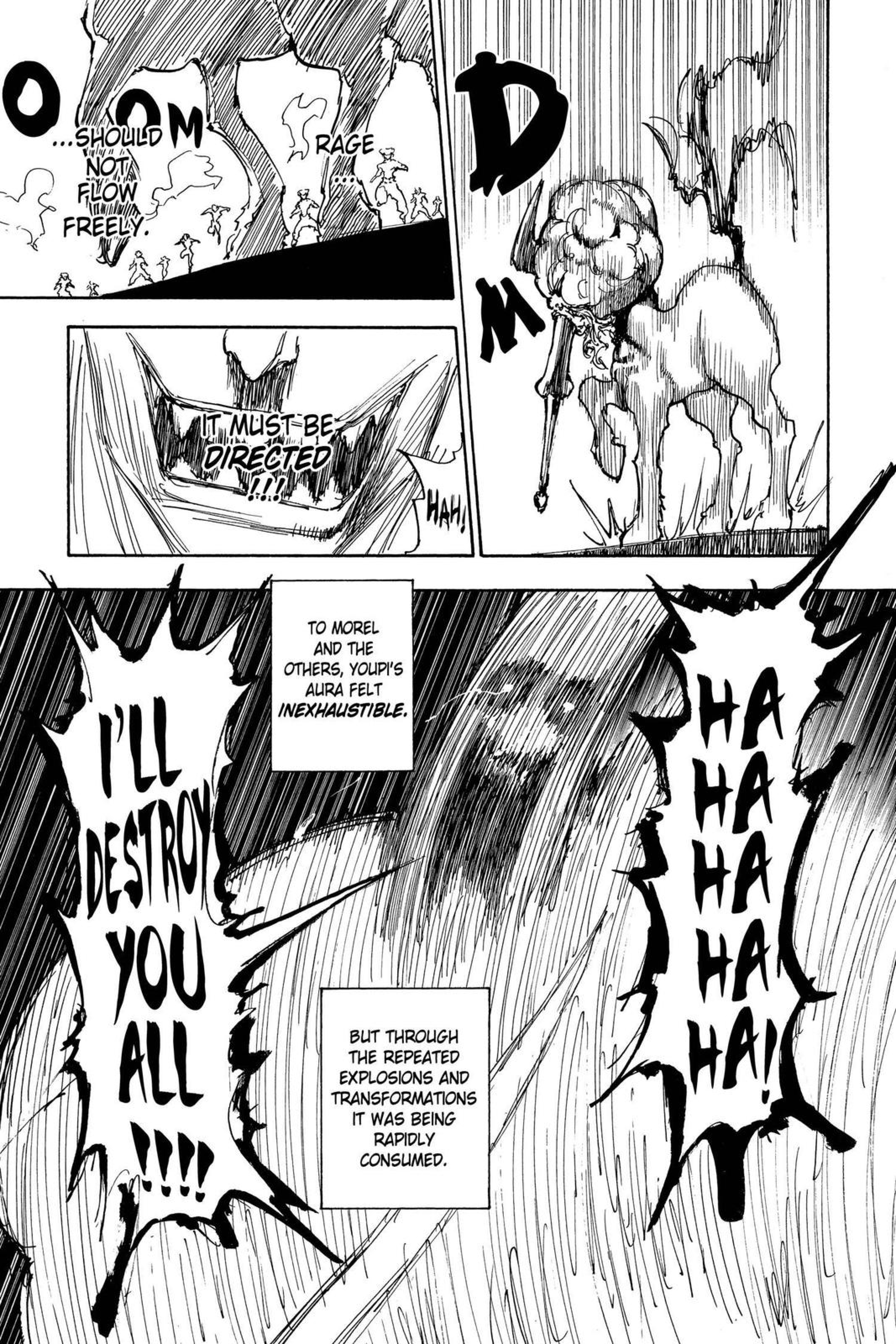
READ THIS WAY

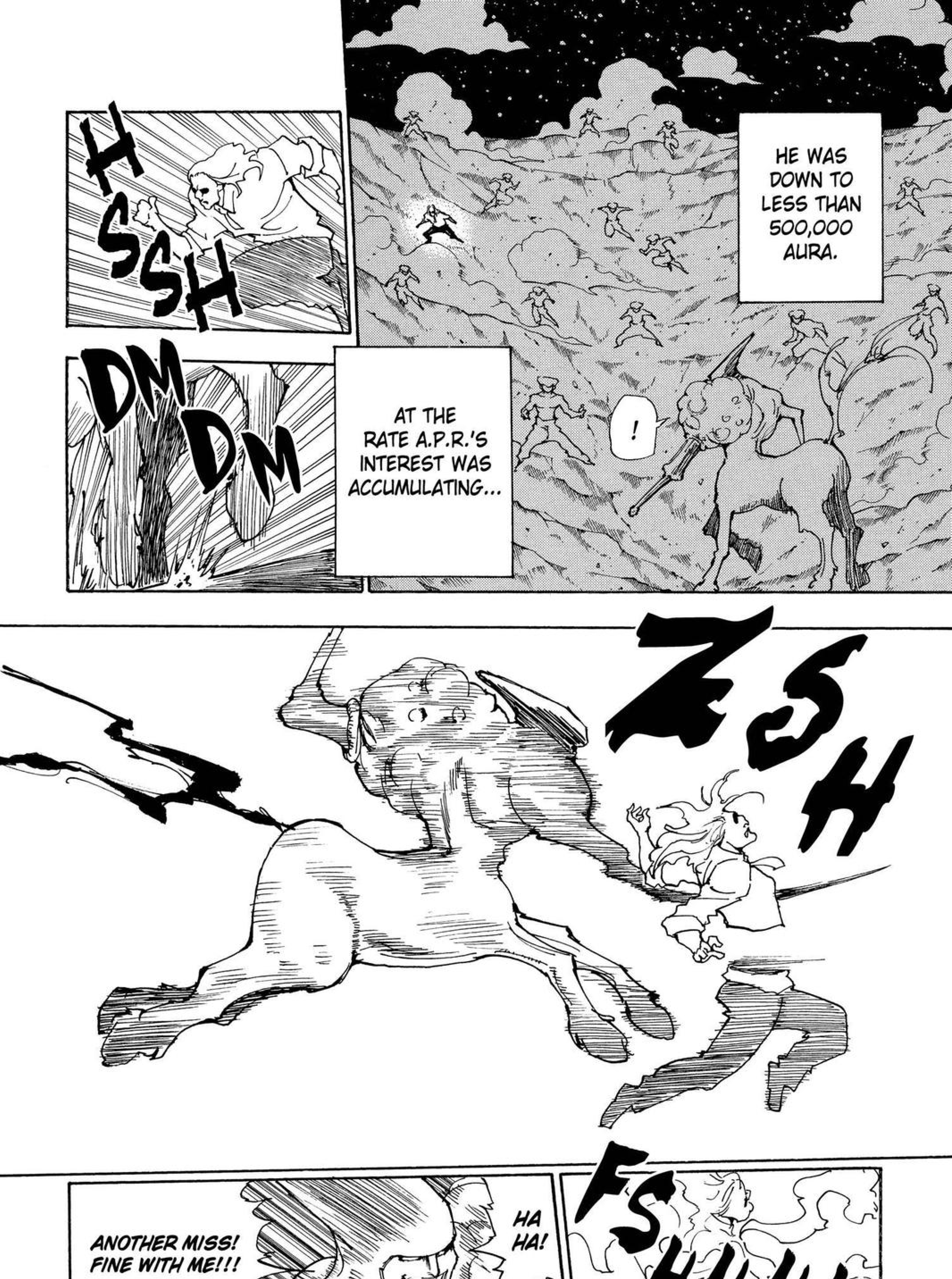

IT'S TIME.
YOU'VE ACCRUED INTEREST.
DOOOM
50091
WHOOOOOO
...

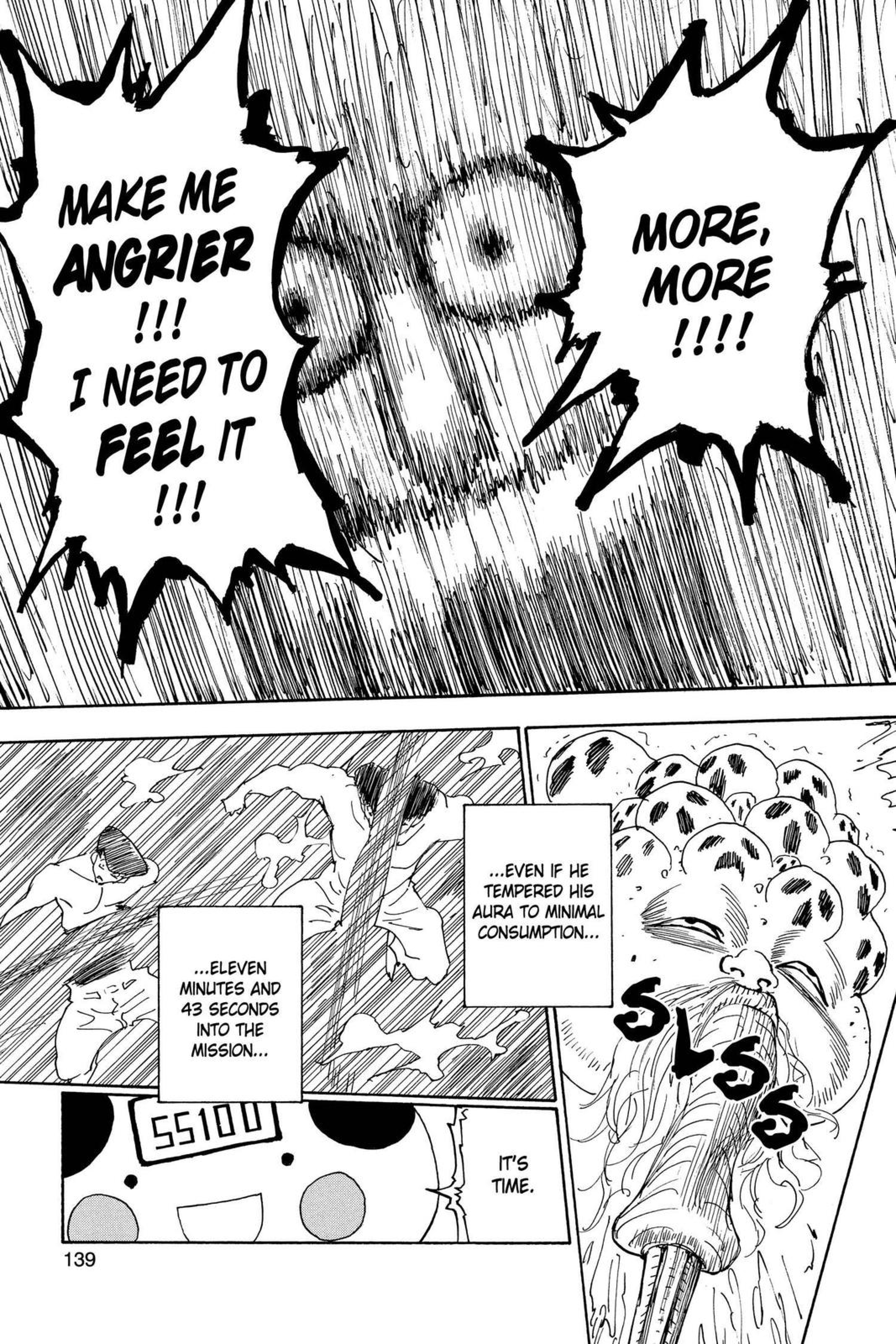

I'VE GOT IT DOWN!!!
CONTROL THE EXPLOSION!!!
I KNOW THAT SENSATION!!!
IF I DO IT ONE MORE TIME...
...I CAN MAKE IT MINE!!!
RROAR
ANGER!! FEEL IT BEFORE I FORGET!!!
YOU MADE A FOOL OUT OF ME NOT ONCE, BUT TWICE!! SCUM-SUCKING PIGS!!
GRAAUGH!!

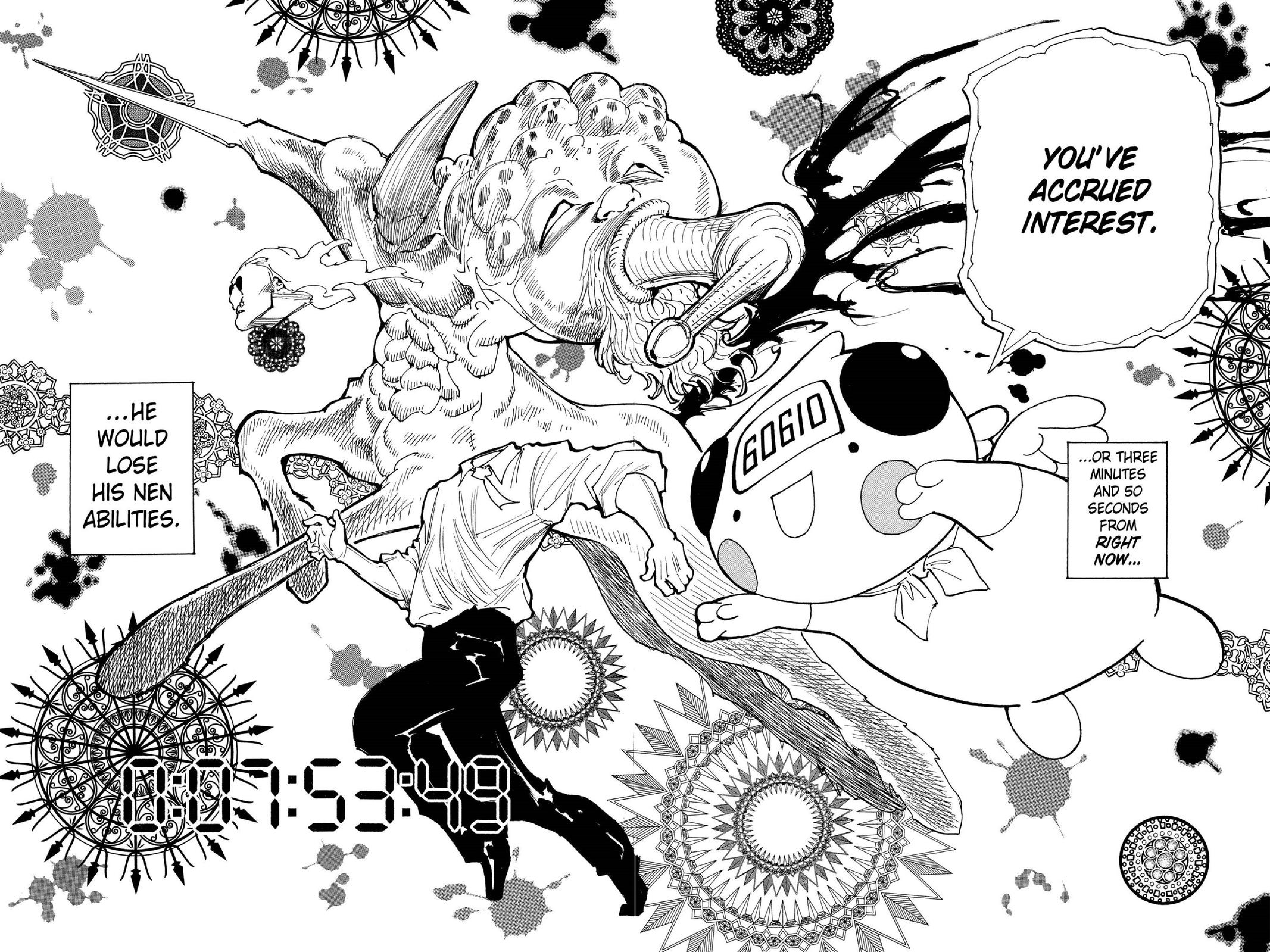

KRII
SNAP
YOUPI
...
KRAK
KRII
KRAK
...HADN'T FULLY REALIZED...
RIP
PWIK
BLP BLP
UNLEASH MY FURY...
...BUT CALMLY!!
KRAK KRAK
SIMULTANEOUS DESTRUCTION AND CREATION!!
...WHY...
MANIFEST IT...
...RECIPROCAL EMOTIONS CAN COEXIST.
...THROUGH MY BODY!!
HENCE
...

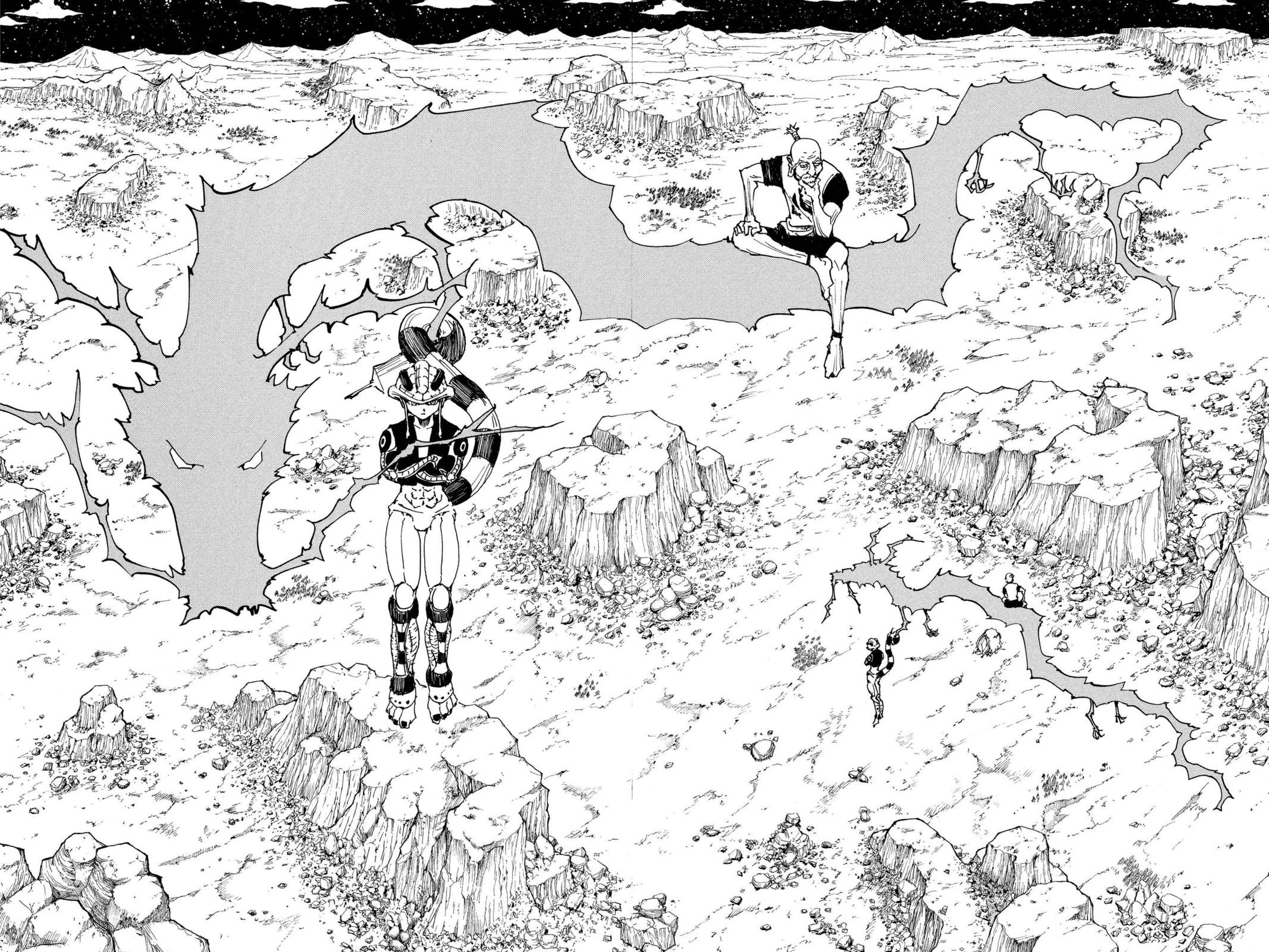

...HIS PRESENT STATE.
DOOOOM
RAGE INCARNATE!!!

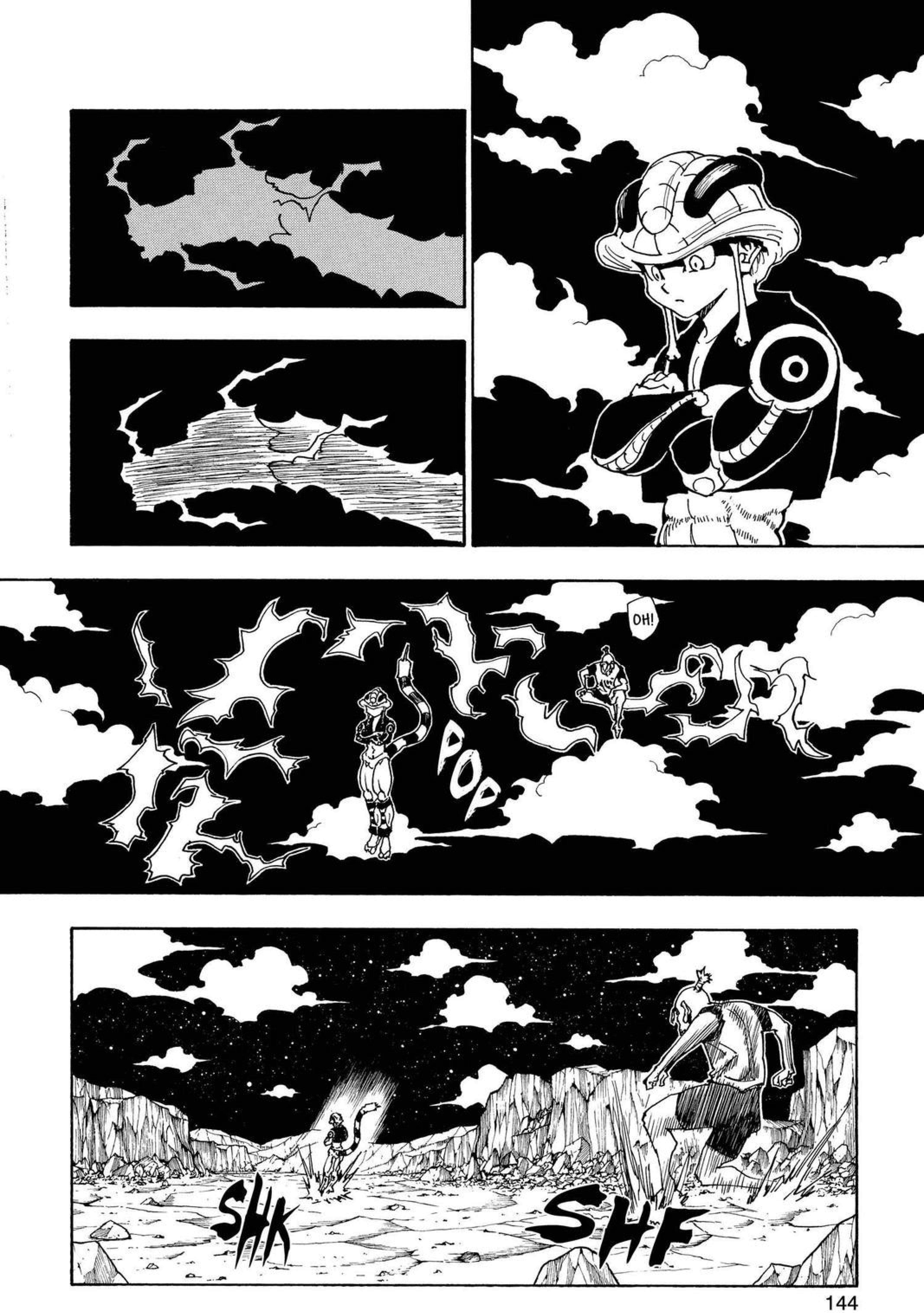

D
M
O
OM
RAGE...
...SHOULD NOT FLOW FREELY.
IT MUST BE *DIRECTED*!!!
HAH!
HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!
TO MOREL AND THE OTHERS, YOUPI'S AURA FELT ***INEXHAUSTIBLE.***
I'LL DESTROY YOU ALL!!!!
BUT THROUGH THE REPEATED EXPLOSIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IT WAS BEING RAPIDLY CONSUMED.

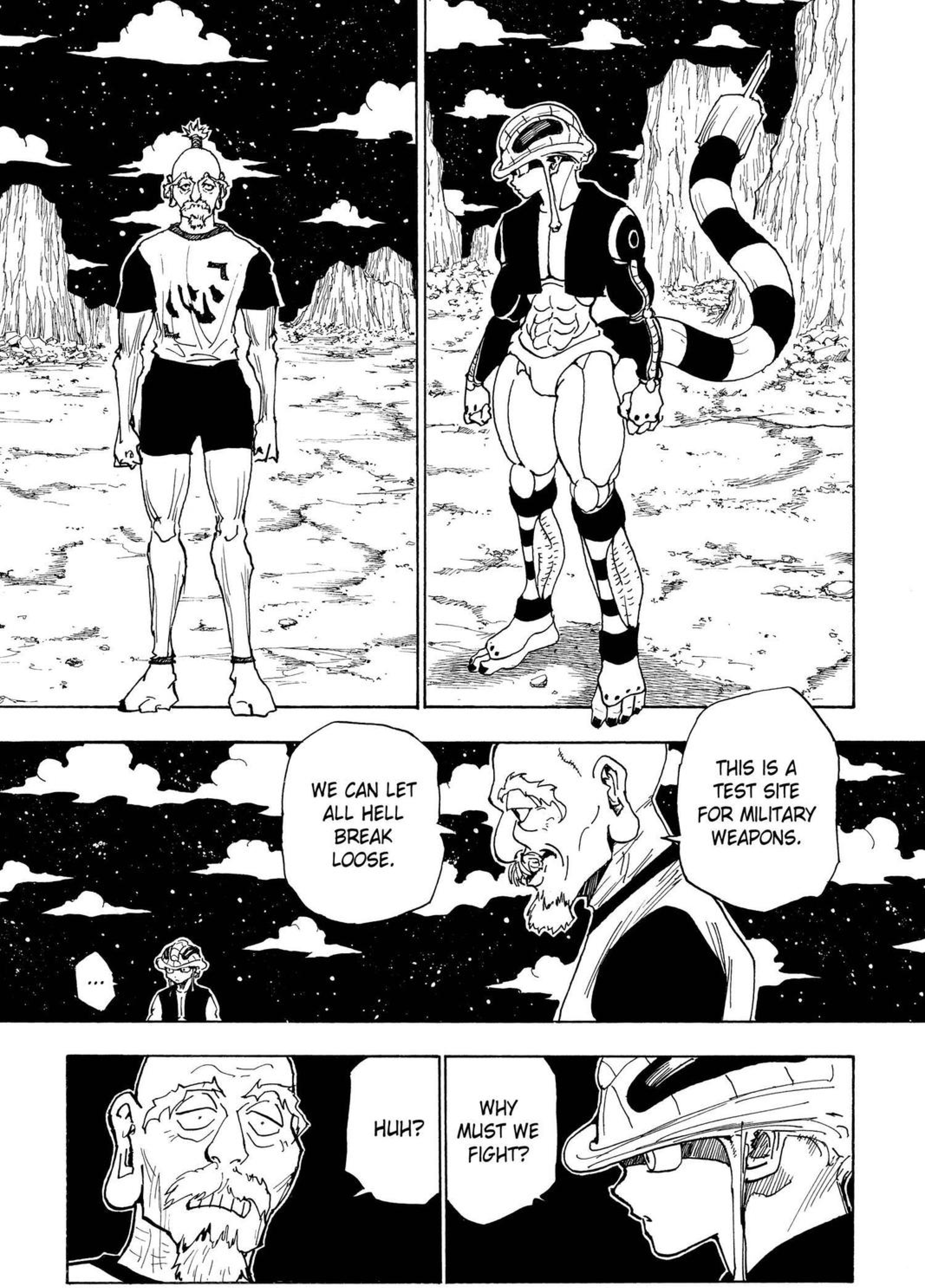

HE WAS DOWN TO LESS THAN 500,000 AURA.
AT THE RATE A.P.R.'S INTEREST WAS ACCUMULATING...
!
HSSH
DMDMDM
ZSH
FSHHHH
HA HA!
ANOTHER MISS! FINE WITH ME!!!

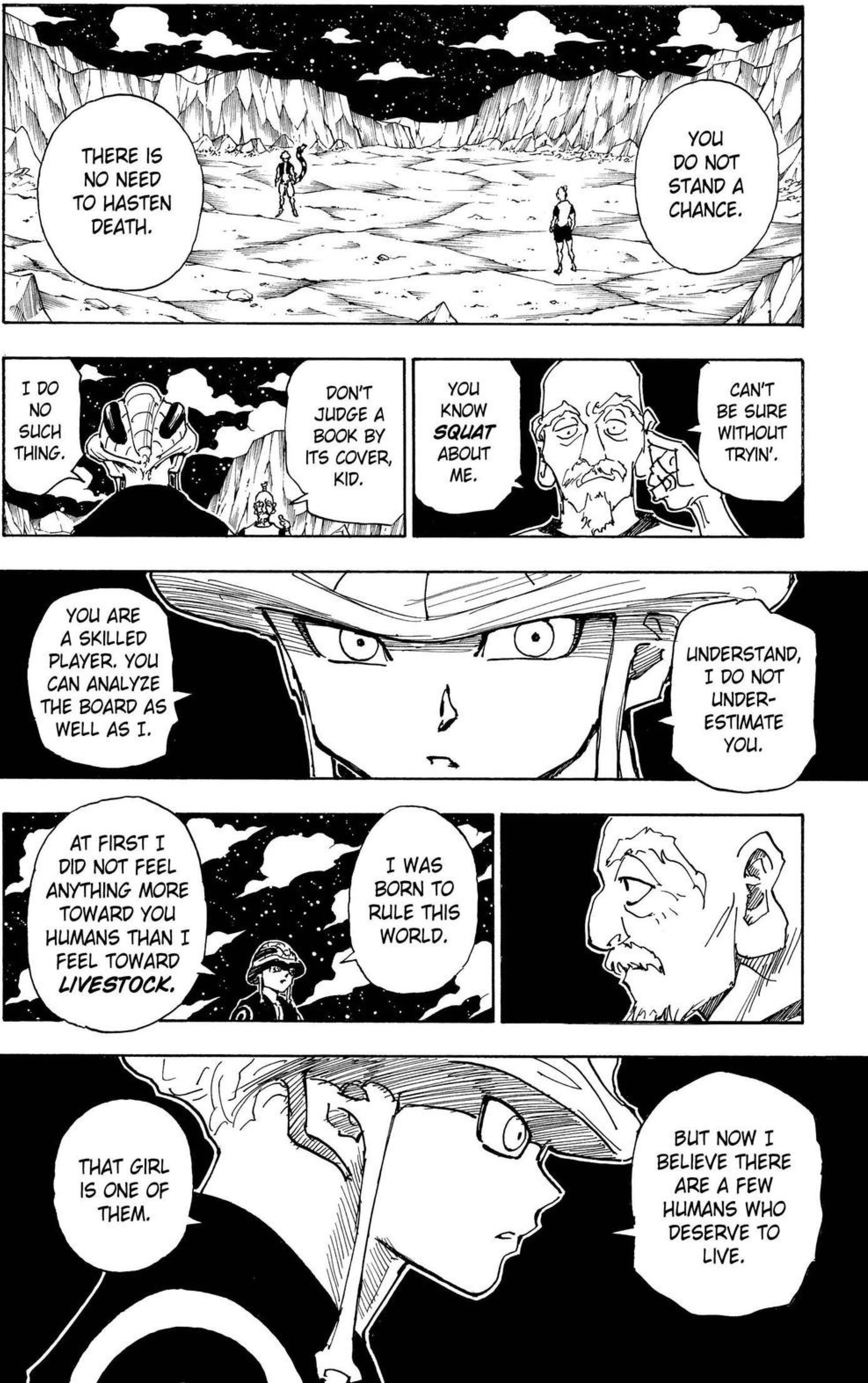

MORE, MORE !!!!
MAKE ME ANGRIER !!! I NEED TO FEEL IT !!!
...EVEN IF HE TEMPERED HIS AURA TO MINIMAL CONSUMPTION...
SLSSS
...ELEVEN MINUTES AND 43 SECONDS INTO THE MISSION...
IT'S TIME.
55100

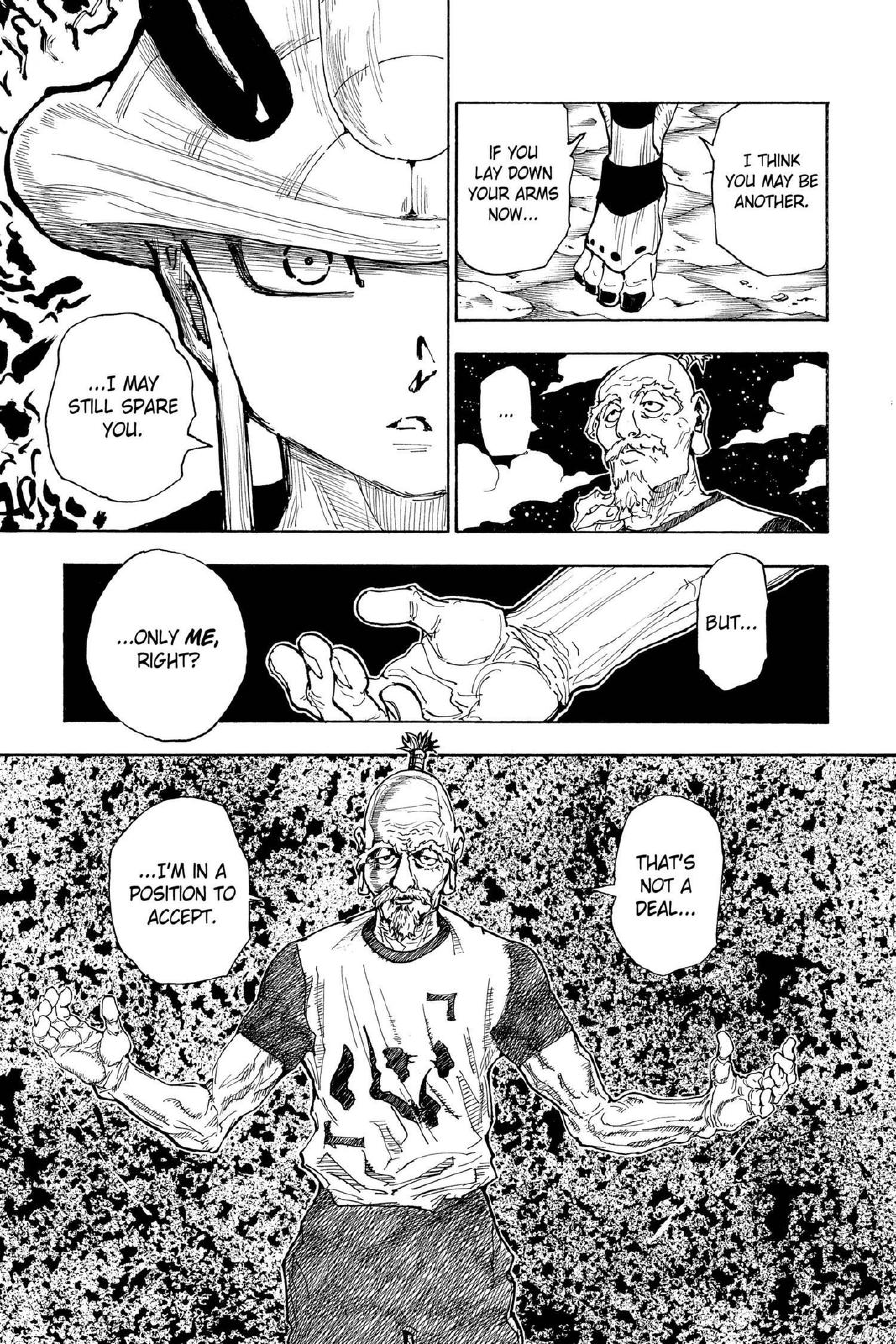

YOU'VE ACCRUED INTEREST.
...OR THREE MINUTES AND 50 SECONDS FROM *RIGHT NOW*...
60610
...HE WOULD LOSE HIS NEN ABILITIES.
0:07:53:49

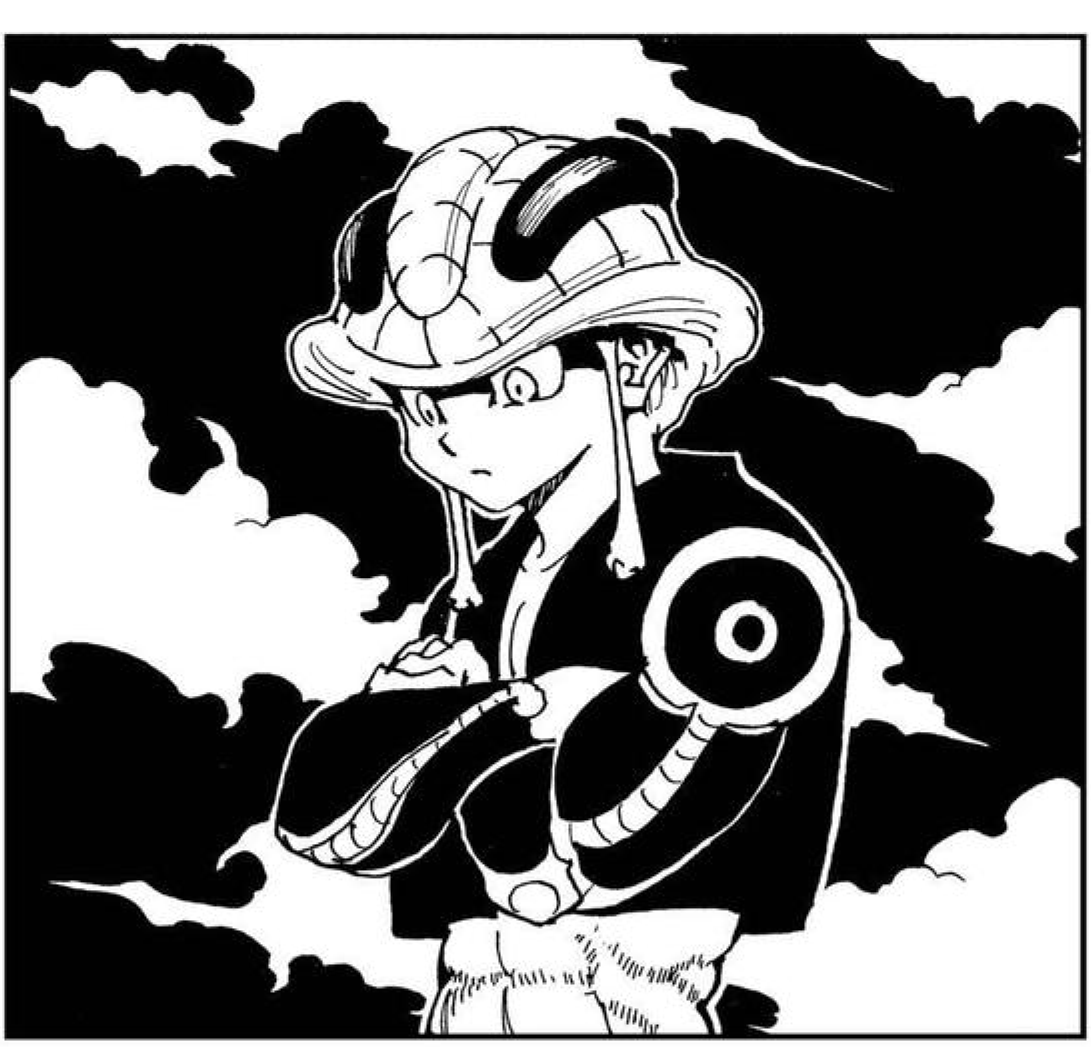



OH!
POP
SHK
SHF

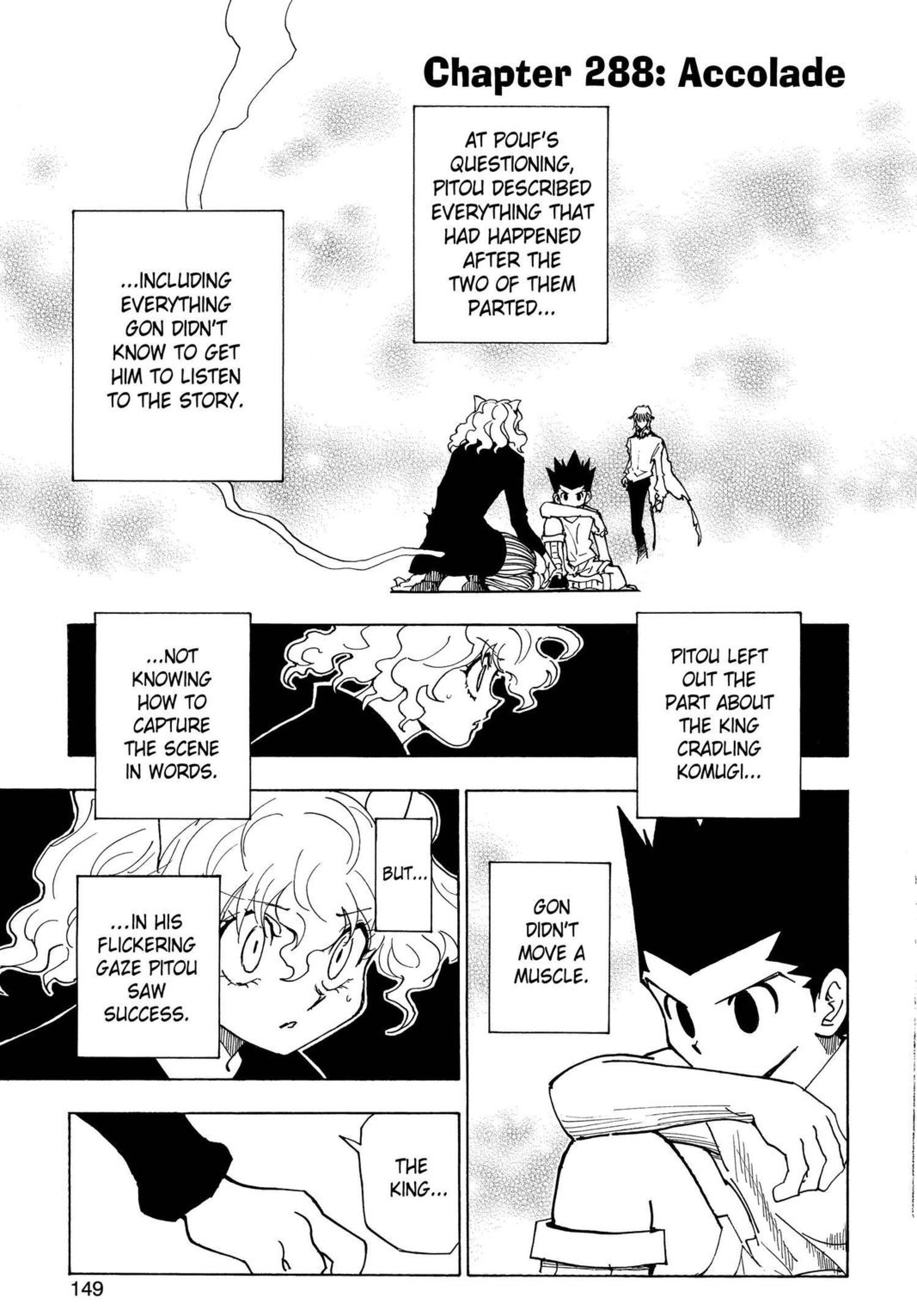

THIS IS A TEST SITE FOR MILITARY WEAPONS.
WE CAN LET ALL HELL BREAK LOOSE.
...
WHY MUST WE FIGHT?
HUH?

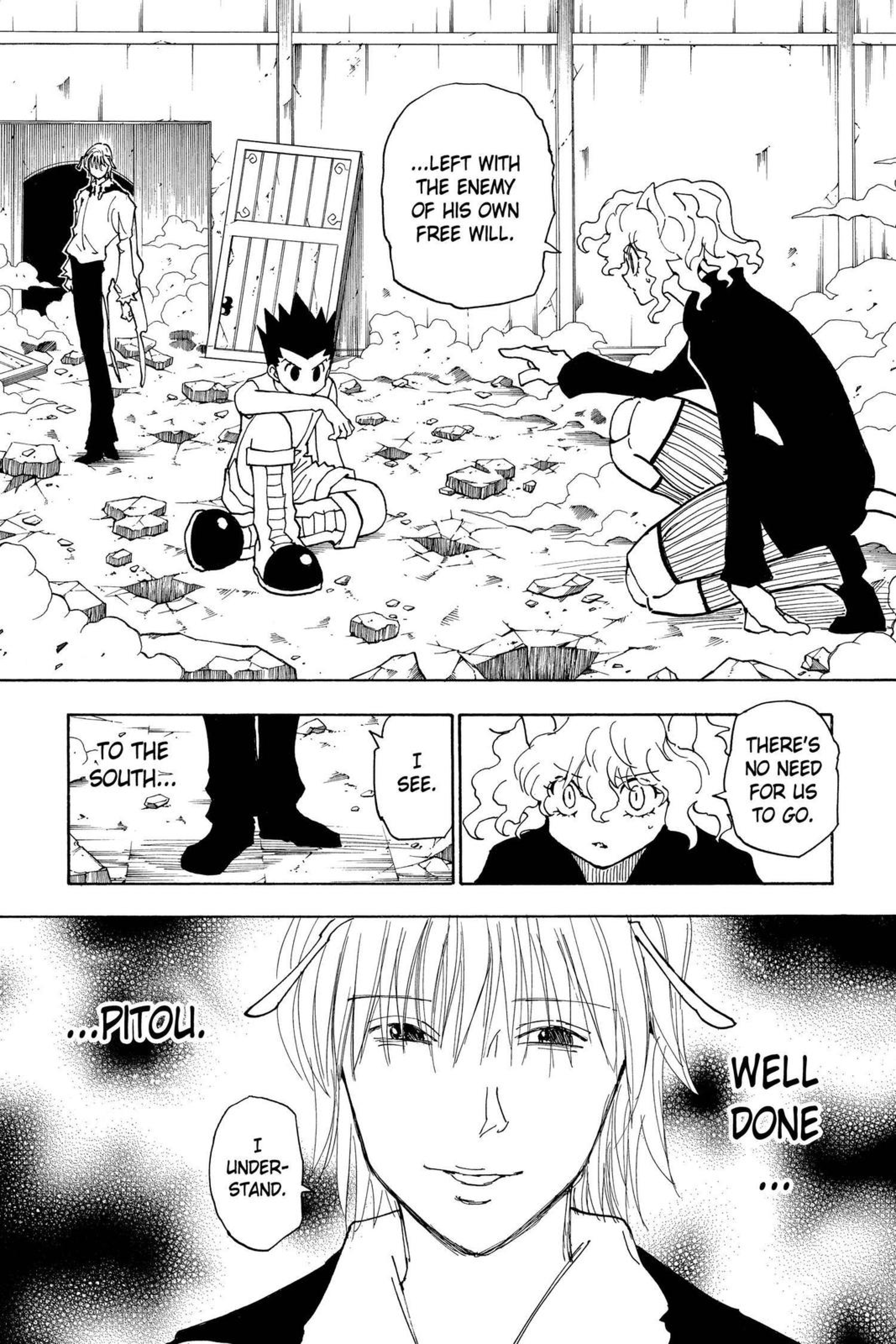

YOU DO NOT STAND A CHANCE.
THERE IS NO NEED TO HASTEN DEATH.
CAN'T BE SURE WITHOUT TRYIN'.
YOU KNOW **SQUAT** ABOUT ME.
DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER, KID.
I DO NO SUCH THING.
UNDERSTAND, I DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE YOU.
YOU ARE A SKILLED PLAYER. YOU CAN ANALYZE THE BOARD AS WELL AS I.
I WAS BORN TO RULE THIS WORLD.
AT FIRST I DID NOT FEEL ANYTHING MORE TOWARD YOU HUMANS THAN I FEEL TOWARD **LIVESTOCK.**
BUT NOW I BELIEVE THERE ARE A FEW HUMANS WHO DESERVE TO LIVE.
THAT GIRL IS ONE OF THEM.

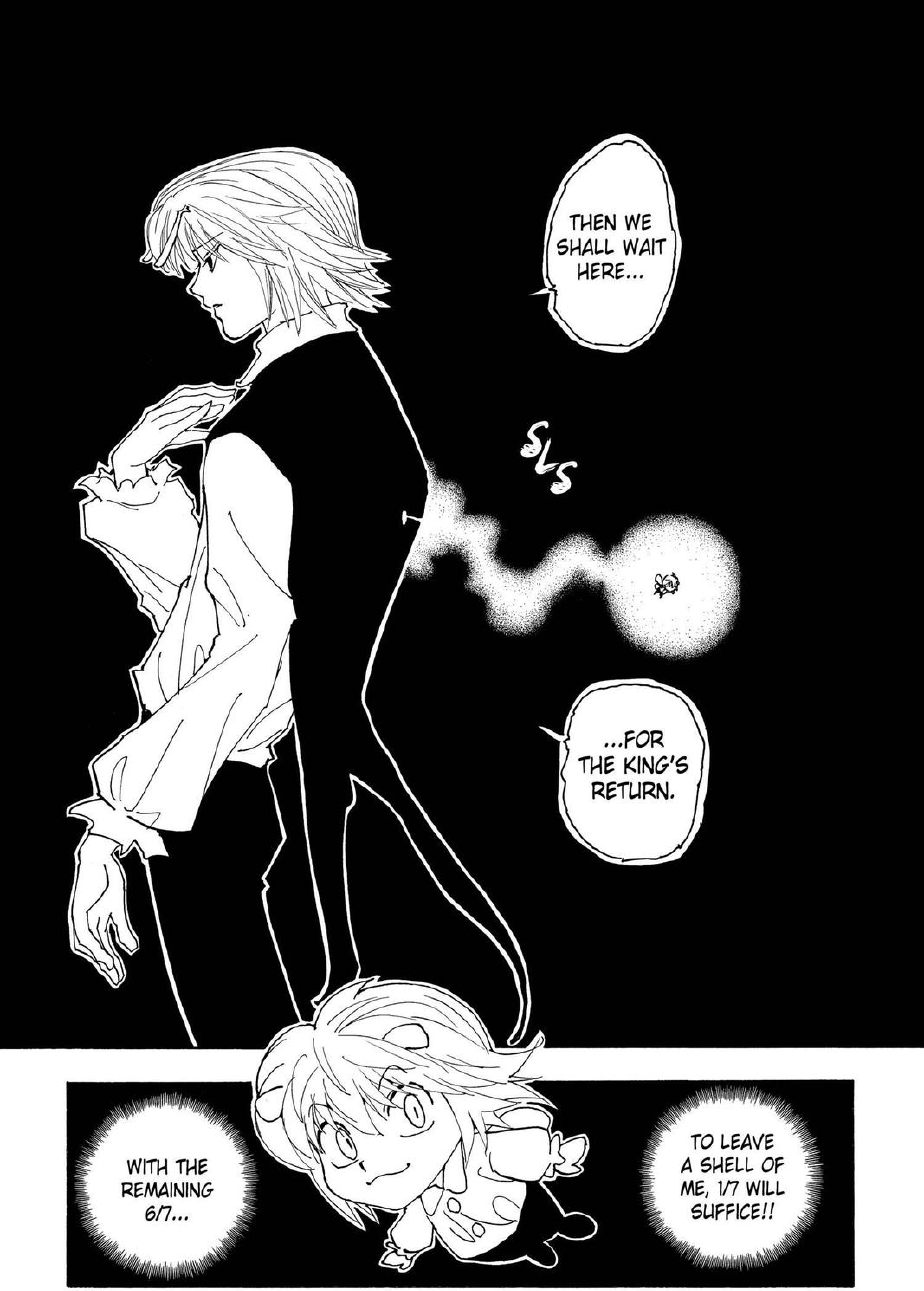

I THINK YOU MAY BE ANOTHER.
IF YOU LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS NOW...
...I MAY STILL SPARE YOU.
...
BUT...
...ONLY **ME**, RIGHT?
THAT'S NOT A DEAL...
...I'M IN A POSITION TO ACCEPT.

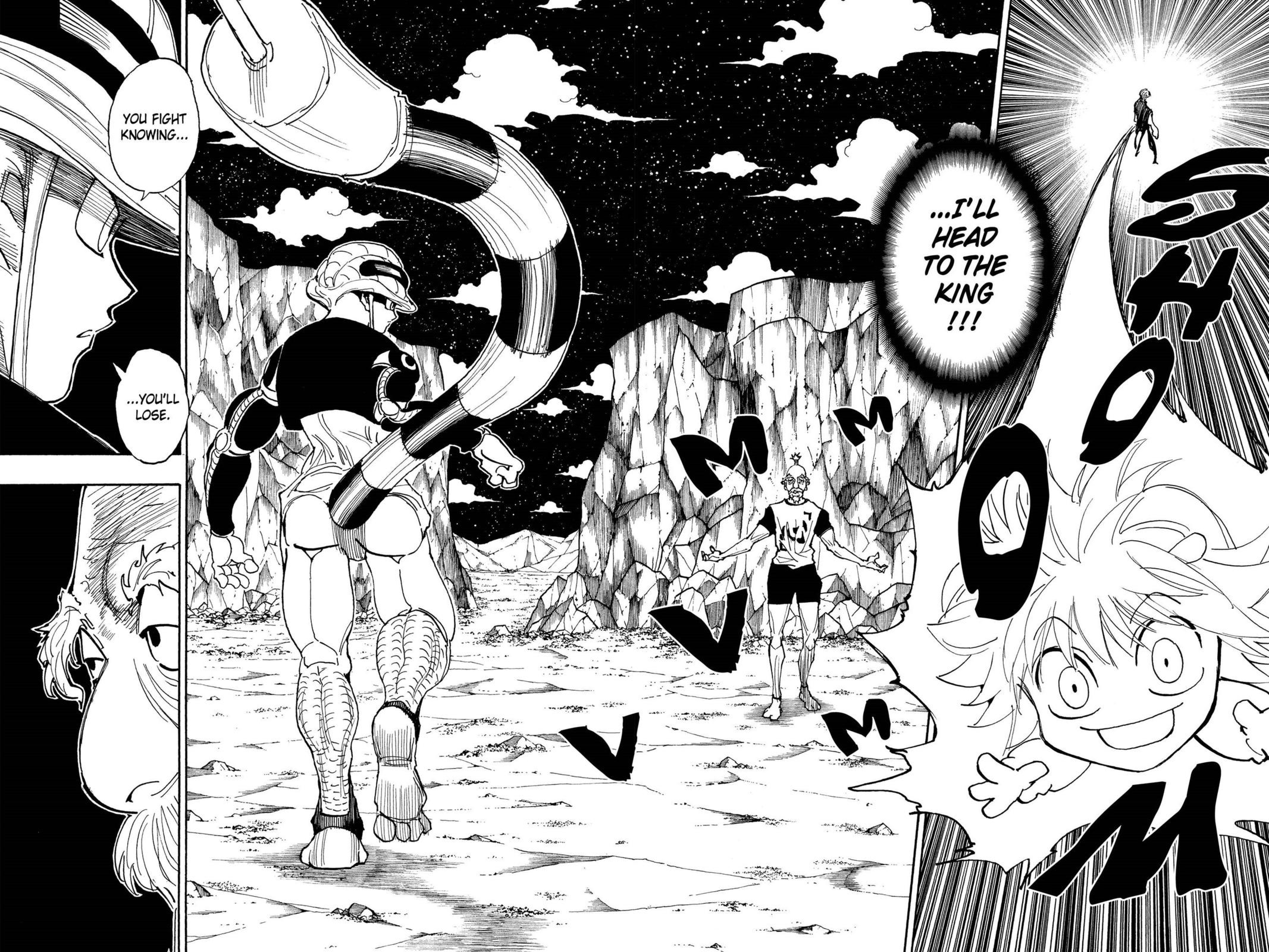


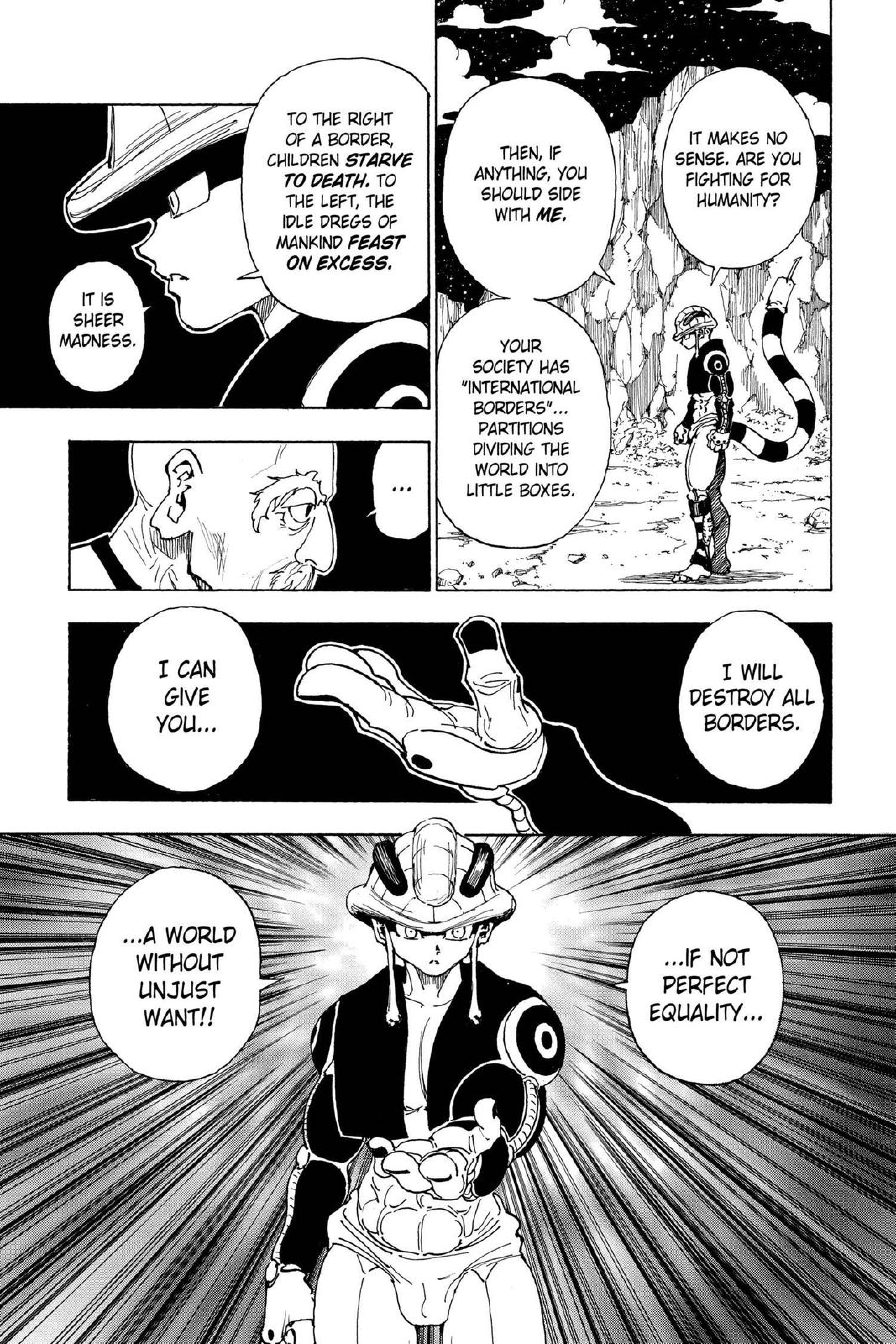
Chapter 288: Accolade

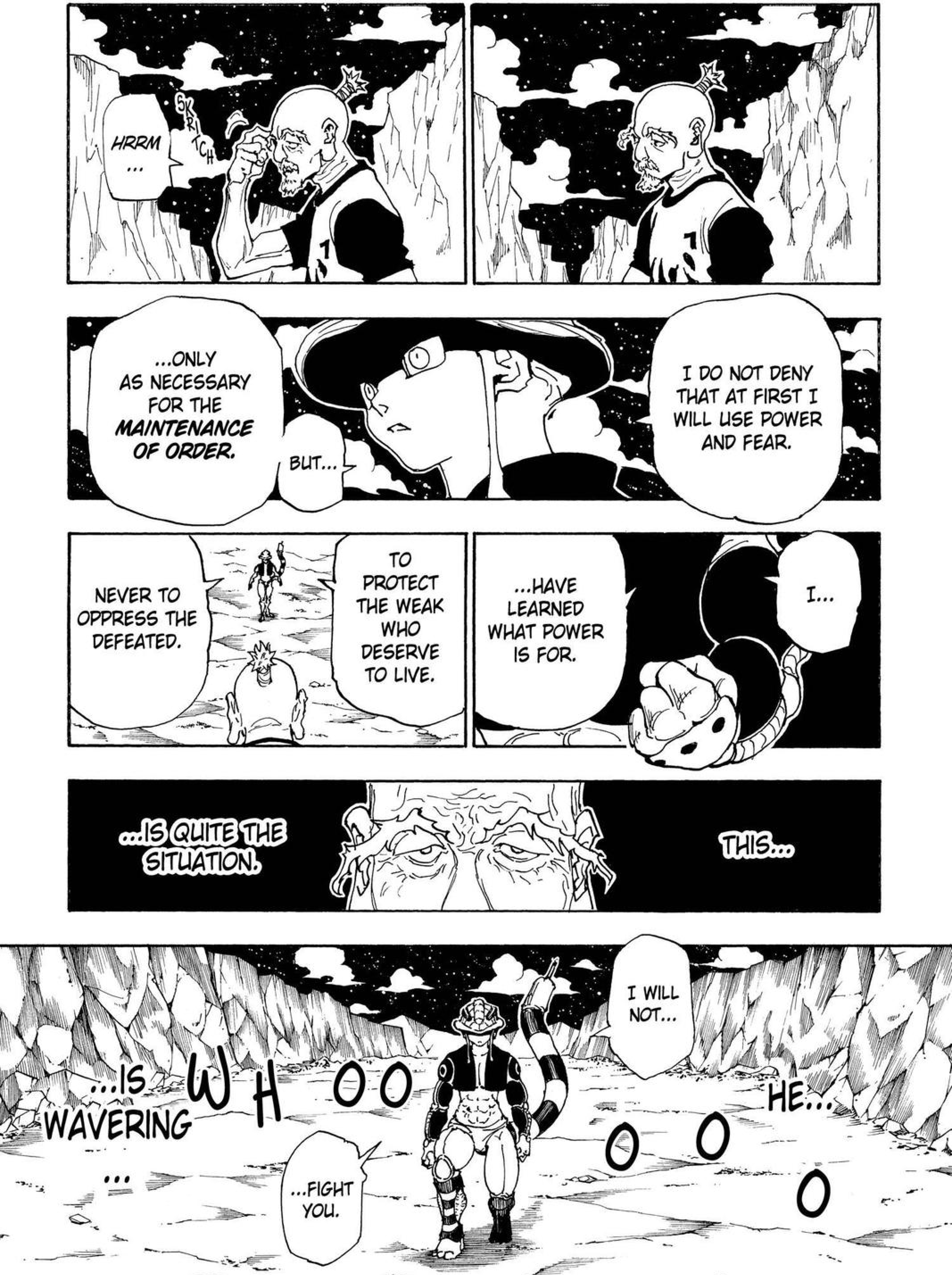

AT POUF'S QUESTIONING, PITOU DESCRIBED EVERYTHING THAT HAD HAPPENED AFTER THE TWO OF THEM PARTED...
...INCLUDING EVERYTHING GON DIDN'T KNOW TO GET HIM TO LISTEN TO THE STORY.
PITOU LEFT OUT THE PART ABOUT THE KING CRADLING KOMUGI...
...NOT KNOWING HOW TO CAPTURE THE SCENE IN WORDS.
GON DIDN'T MOVE A MUSCLE.
BUT...
...IN HIS FLICKERING GAZE PITOU SAW SUCCESS.
THE KING...

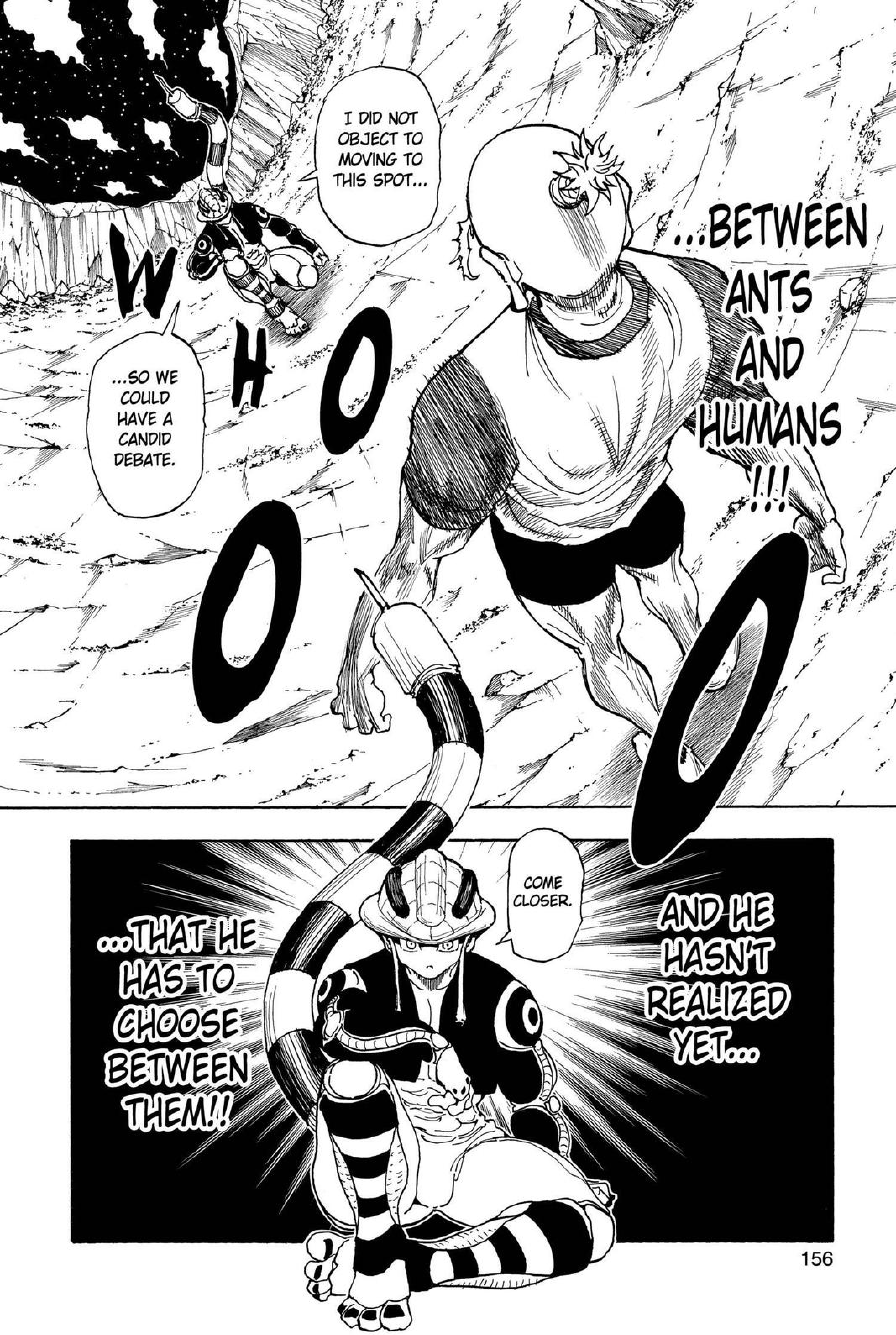

...LEFT WITH THE ENEMY OF HIS OWN FREE WILL.
THERE'S NO NEED FOR US TO GO.
I SEE.
TO THE SOUTH...
WELL DONE ...
...PITOU.
I UNDERSTAND.

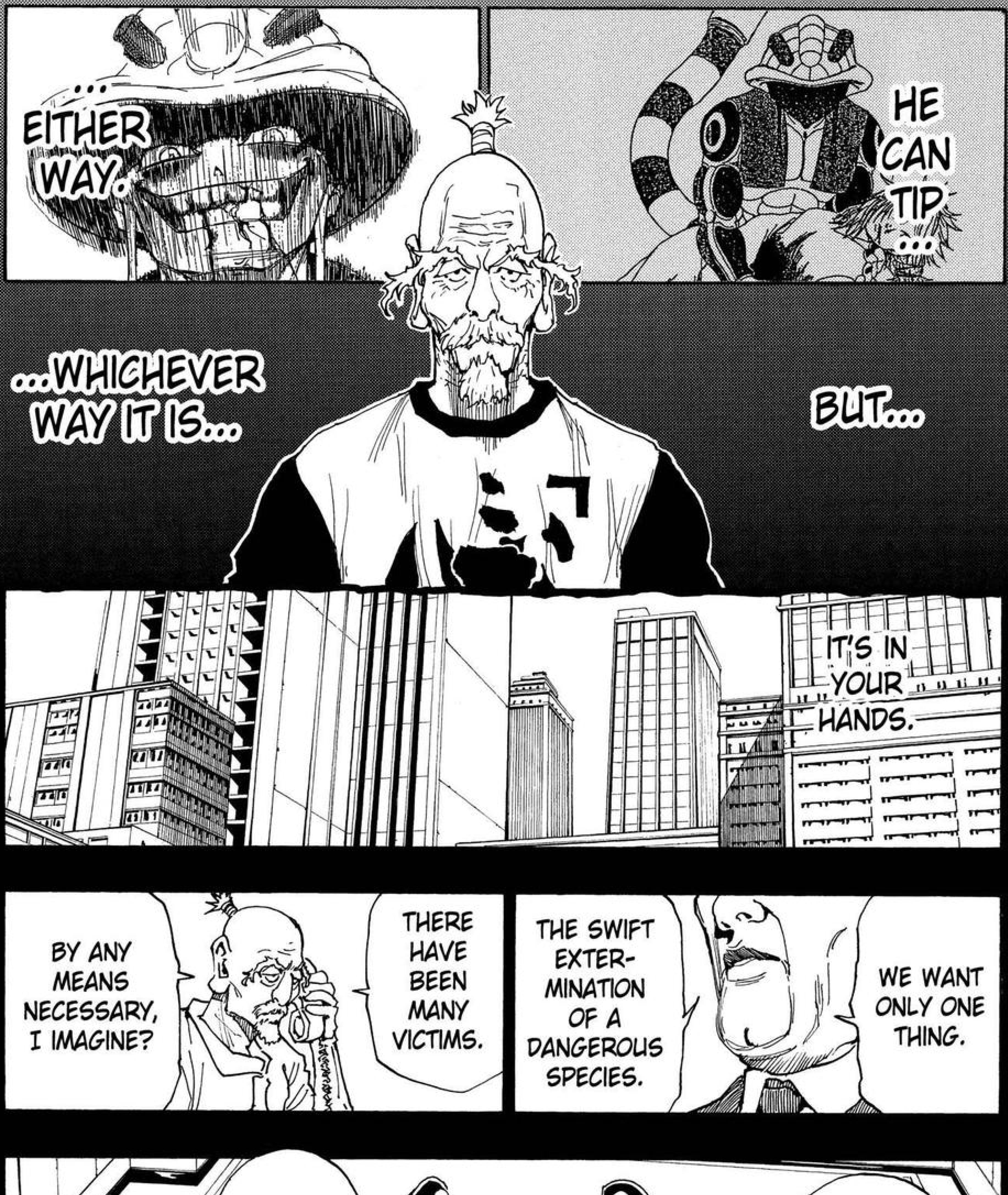

THEN WE SHALL WAIT HERE...
SVS
...FOR THE KING'S RETURN.
TO LEAVE A SHELL OF ME, 1/7 WILL SUFFICE!!
WITH THE REMAINING 6/7...

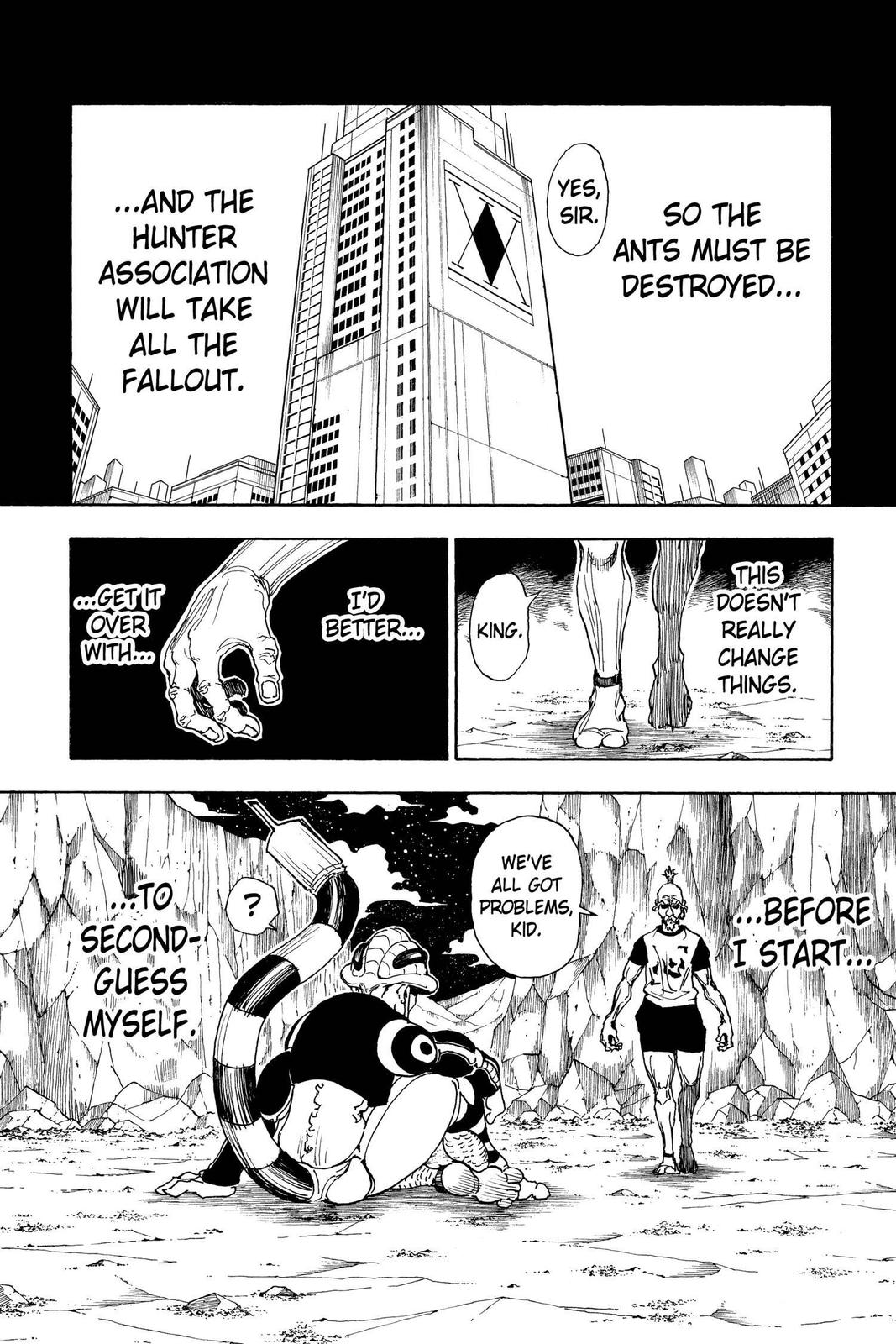

SHOOOM
...I'LL HEAD TO THE KING!!!
MMMVV
YOU FIGHT KNOWING...
...YOU'LL LOSE.

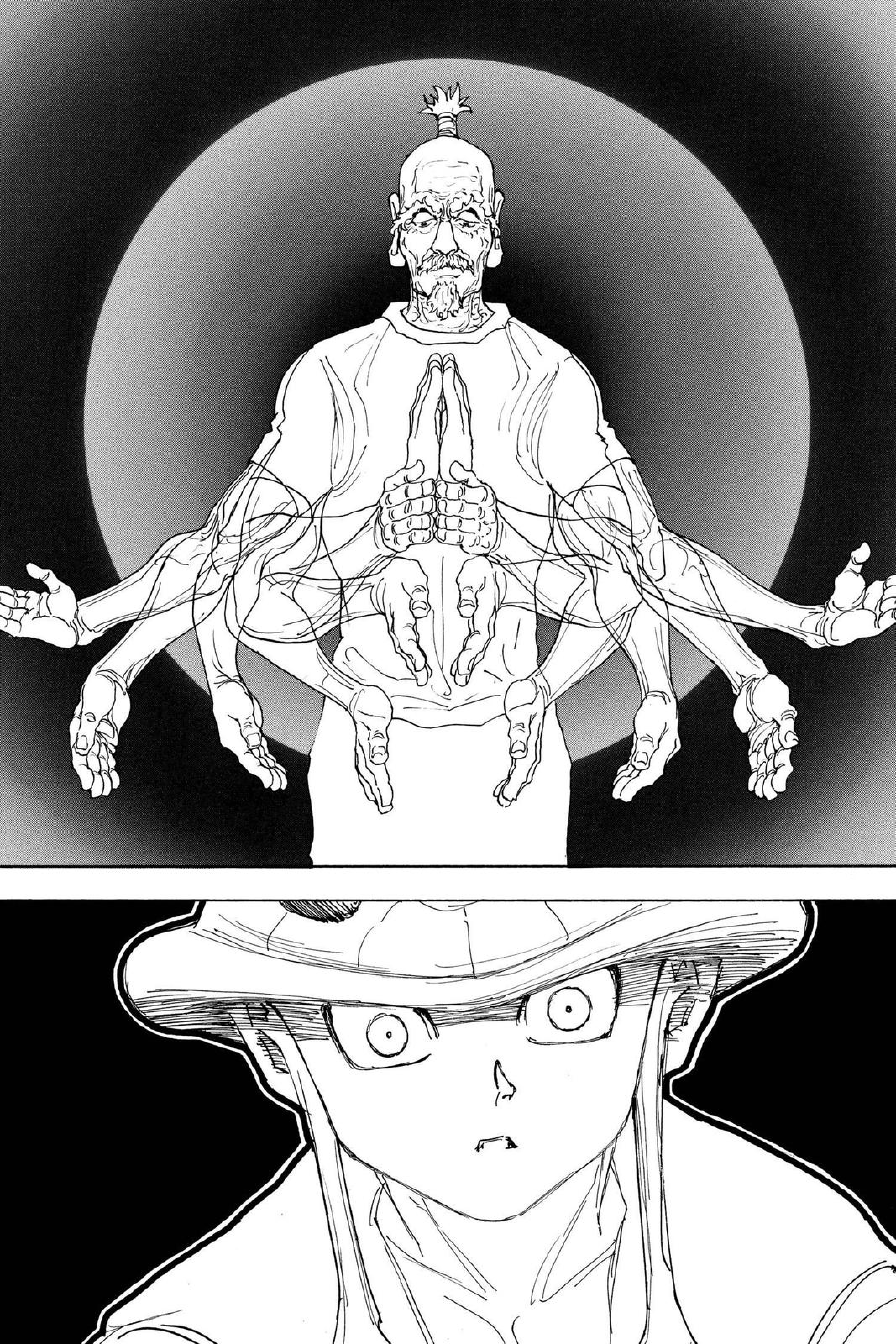

IT MAKES NO SENSE. ARE YOU FIGHTING FOR HUMANITY?
THEN, IF ANYTHING, YOU SHOULD SIDE WITH **ME.**
YOUR SOCIETY HAS "INTERNATIONAL BORDERS"... PARTITIONS DIVIDING THE WORLD INTO LITTLE BOXES.
TO THE RIGHT OF A BORDER, CHILDREN ***STARVE TO DEATH.*** TO THE LEFT, THE IDLE DREGS OF MANKIND ***FEAST ON EXCESS.***
IT IS SHEER MADNESS.
...
I WILL DESTROY ALL BORDERS.
I CAN GIVE YOU...
...IF NOT PERFECT EQUALITY...
...A WORLD WITHOUT UNJUST WANT!!

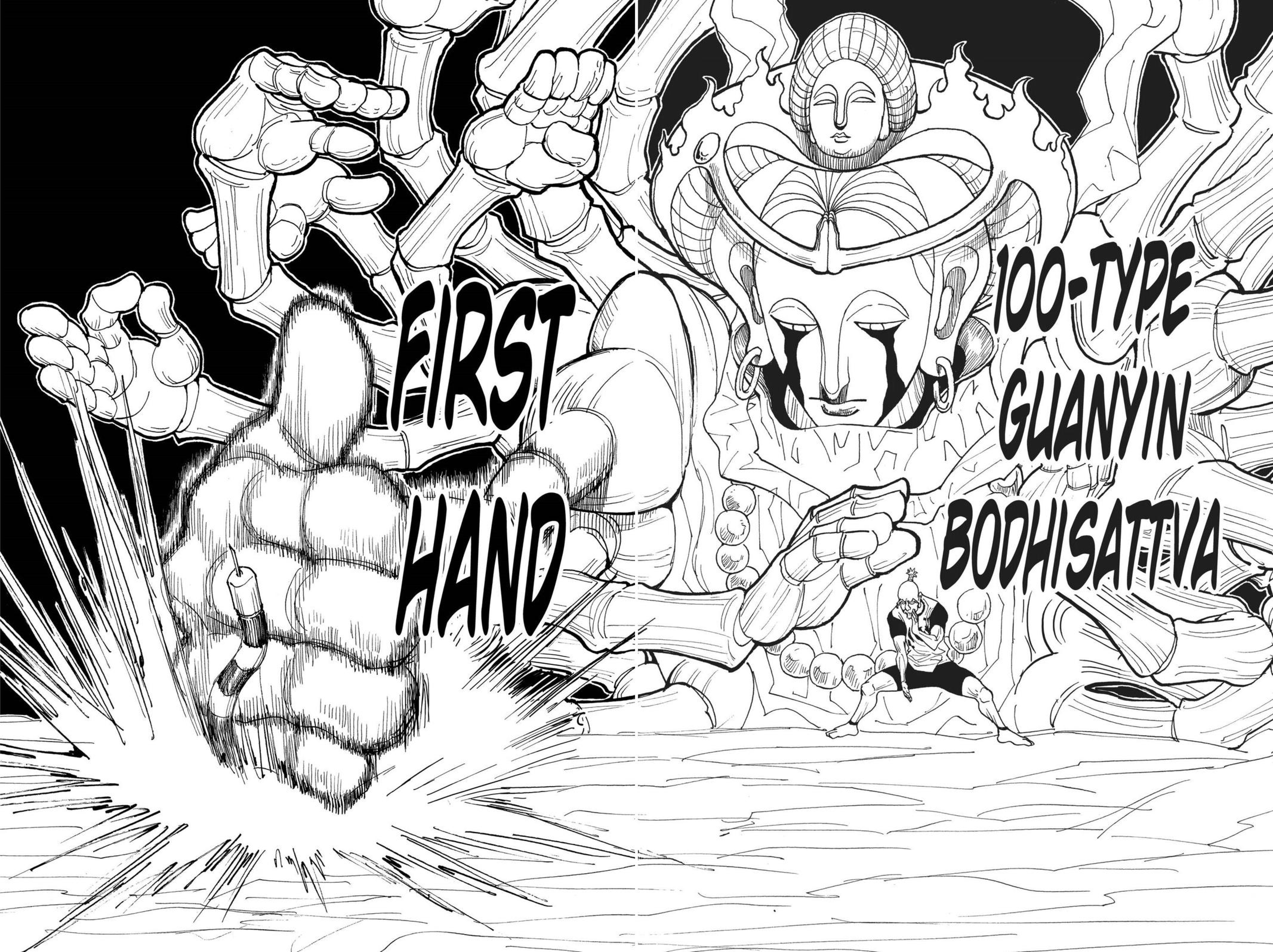

HRRM ...
SKRITCH
I DO NOT DENY THAT AT FIRST I WILL USE POWER AND FEAR.
BUT...
...ONLY AS NECESSARY FOR THE *MAINTENANCE OF ORDER.*
I...
...HAVE LEARNED WHAT POWER IS FOR.
TO PROTECT THE WEAK WHO DESERVE TO LIVE.
NEVER TO OPPRESS THE DEFEATED.
THIS...
...IS QUITE THE SITUATION.
I WILL NOT...
...FIGHT YOU.
HE...
...IS WAVERING ...
WHOOOOOOO

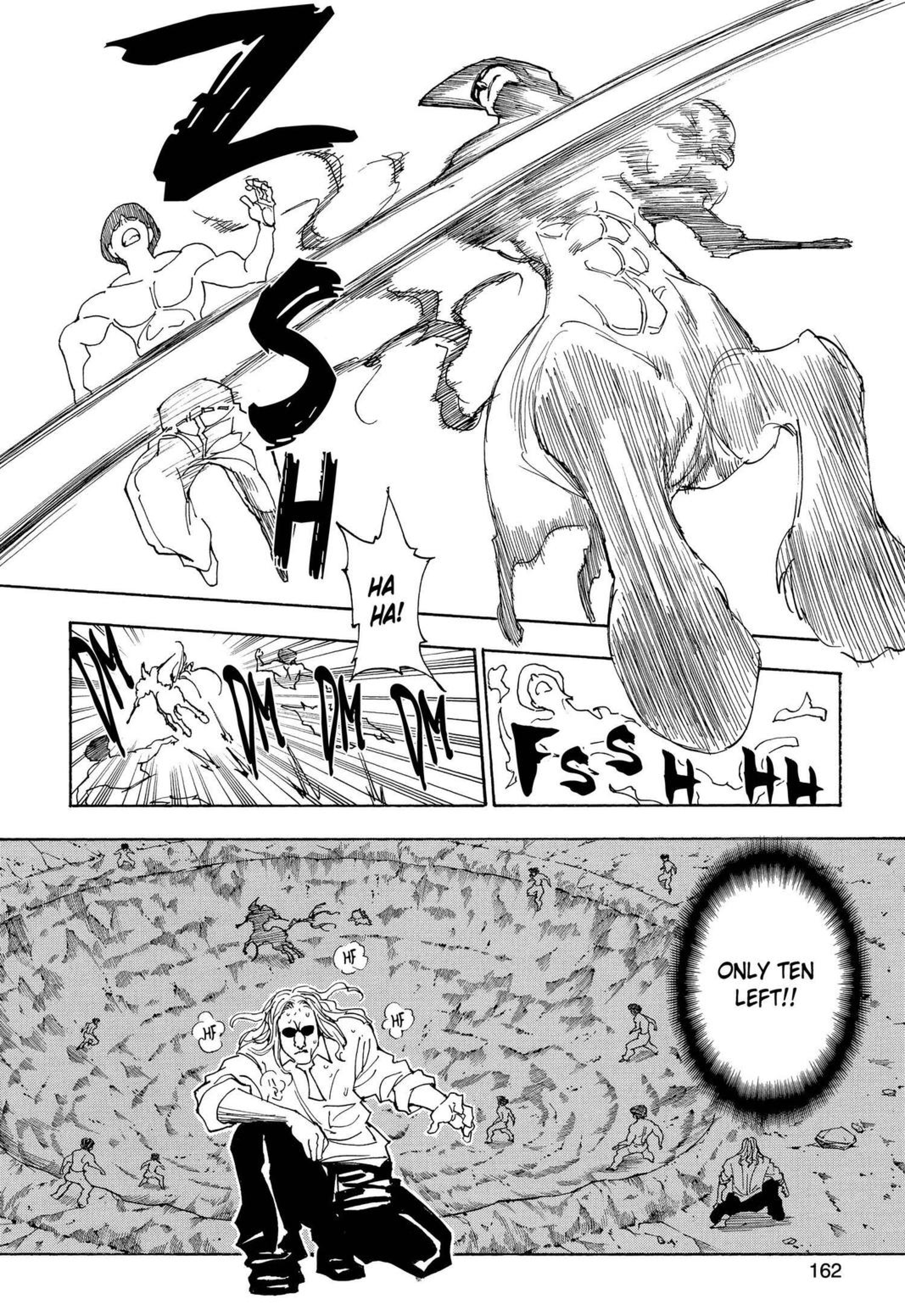

I DID NOT OBJECT TO MOVING TO THIS SPOT...
...SO WE COULD HAVE A CANDID DEBATE.
...BETWEEN ANTS AND HUMANS!!!
WHOOOO
COME CLOSER.
AND HE HASN'T REALIZED YET...
...THAT HE HAS TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THEM!!

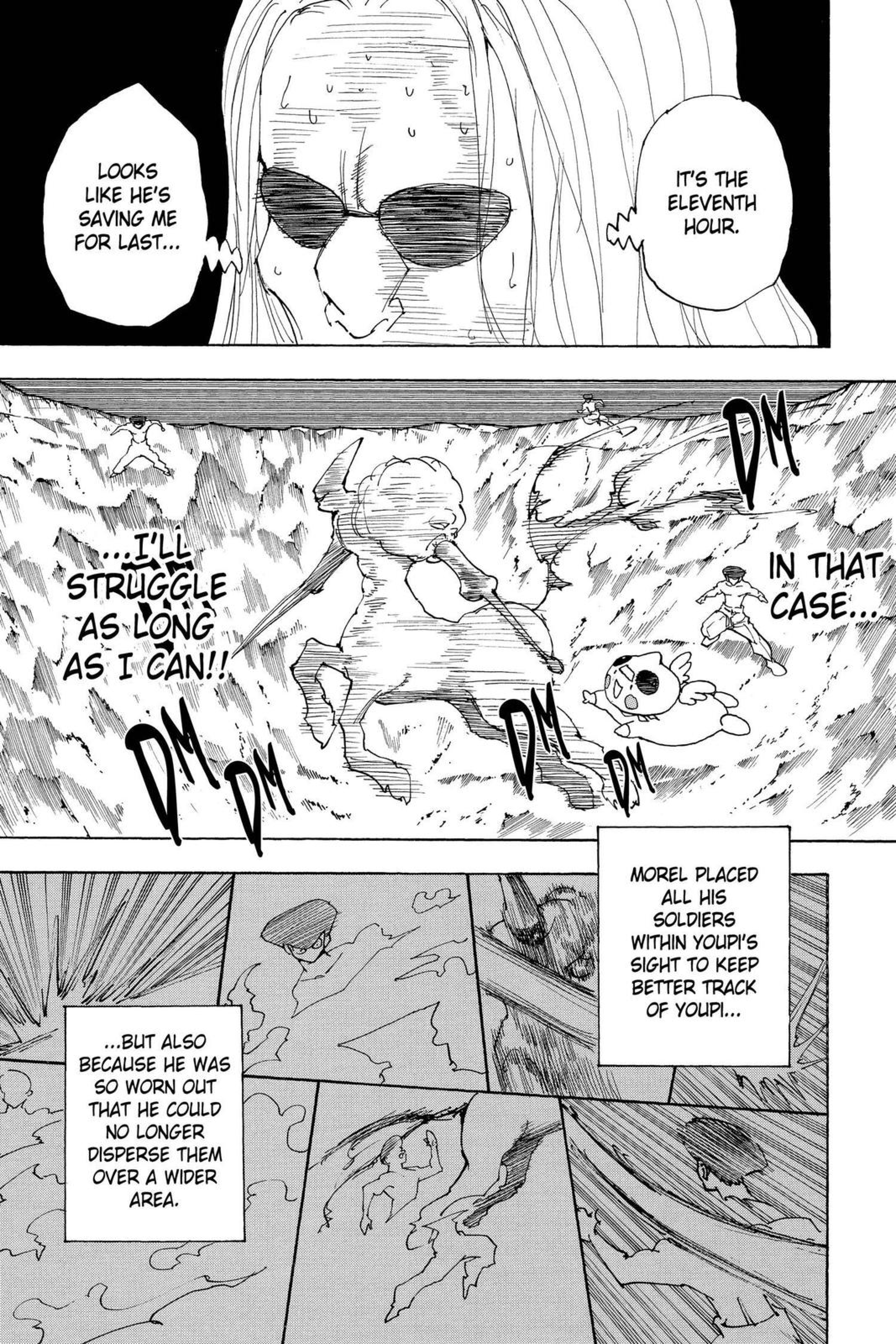

HE CAN TIP ...
... EITHER WAY.
BUT...
...WHICHEVER WAY IT IS...
IT'S IN YOUR HANDS.
WE WANT ONLY ONE THING.
THE SWIFT EXTERMINATION OF A DANGEROUS SPECIES.
THERE HAVE BEEN MANY VICTIMS.
BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY, I IMAGINE?
WE'RE NOT THE EXPERTS HERE. *YOU* ARE.
WE JUST WANT THEM...
...EXTERMINATED AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

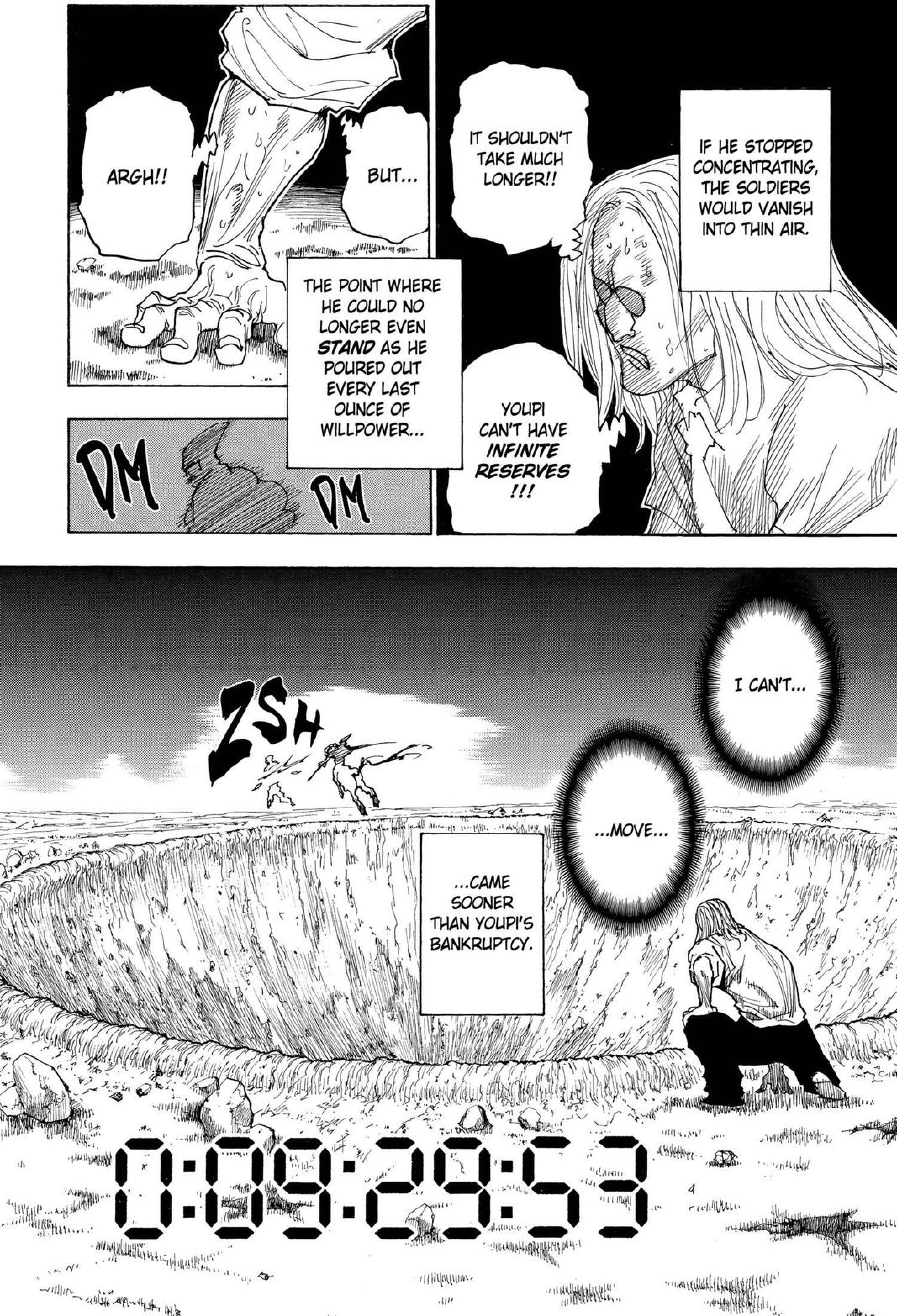

SO THE ANTS MUST BE DESTROYED...
YES, SIR.
...AND THE HUNTER ASSOCIATION WILL TAKE ALL THE FALLOUT.
THIS DOESN'T REALLY CHANGE THINGS.
KING.
I'D BETTER...
...GET IT OVER WITH...
...BEFORE I START...
WE'VE ALL GOT PROBLEMS, KID.
?
...TO SECOND-GUESS MYSELF.



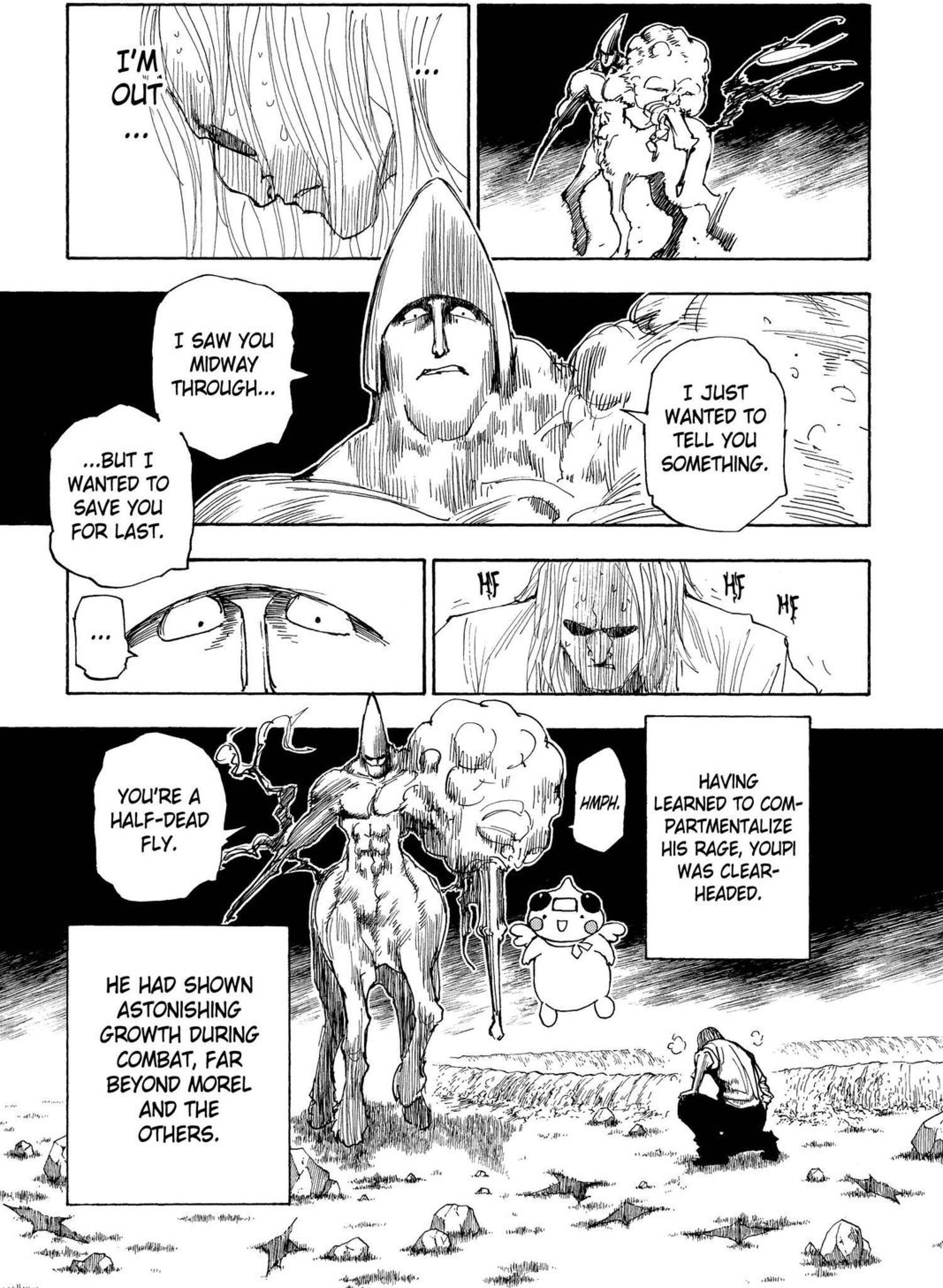

100-TYPE GUANYIN BODHISATTVA
FIRST HAND

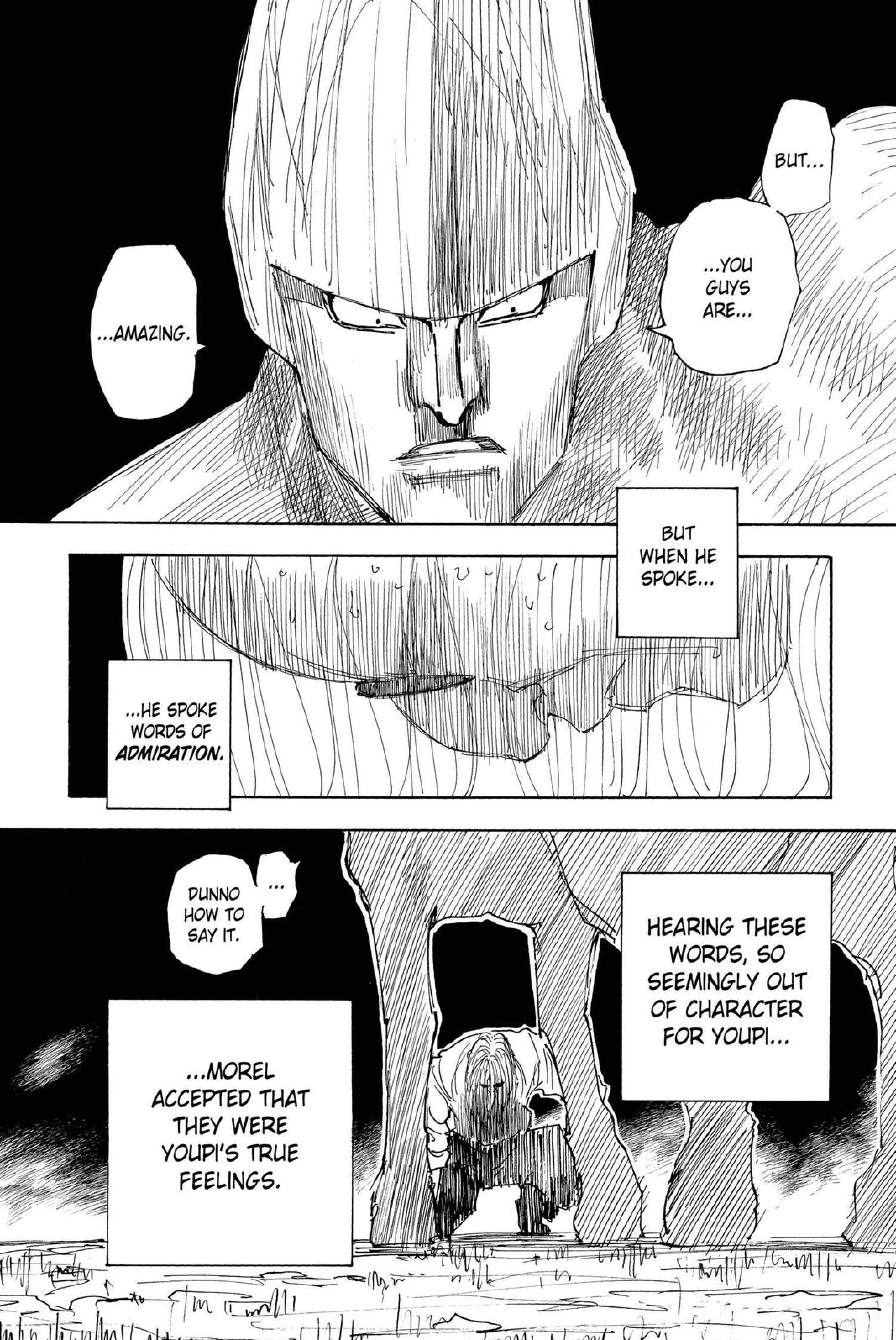

ZSH
HA HA!
FSSHHH
DM DM DM DM
HF
HF
HF
ONLY TEN LEFT!!


IT'S THE ELEVENTH HOUR.
LOOKS LIKE HE'S SAVING ME FOR LAST...
DM
IN THAT CASE...
...I'LL STRUGGLE AS LONG AS I CAN!!
DM
DM
DM
DM
MOREL PLACED ALL HIS SOLDIERS WITHIN YOUPI'S SIGHT TO KEEP BETTER TRACK OF YOUPI...
...BUT ALSO BECAUSE HE WAS SO WORN OUT THAT HE COULD NO LONGER DISPERSE THEM OVER A WIDER AREA.

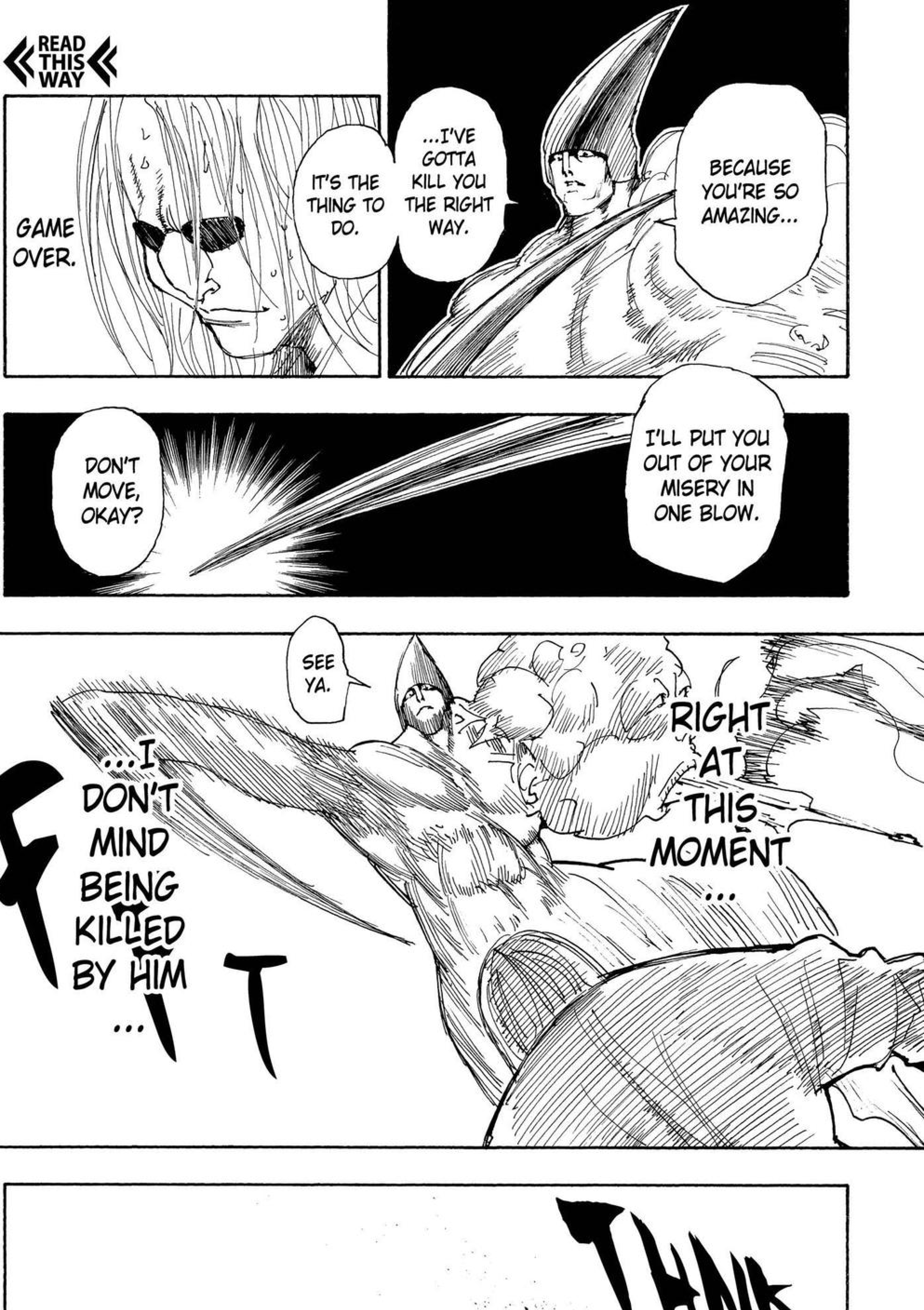

IF HE STOPPED CONCENTRATING, THE SOLDIERS WOULD VANISH INTO THIN AIR.
IT SHOULDN'T TAKE MUCH LONGER!!
YOUPI CAN'T HAVE *INFINITE RESERVES*!!!
BUT...
ARGH!!
THE POINT WHERE HE COULD NO LONGER EVEN *STAND* AS HE POURED OUT EVERY LAST OUNCE OF WILLPOWER...
DM
DM
I CAN'T...
...MOVE...
...CAME SOONER THAN YOUPI'S BANKRUPTCY.
ZSH
0:09:29:53

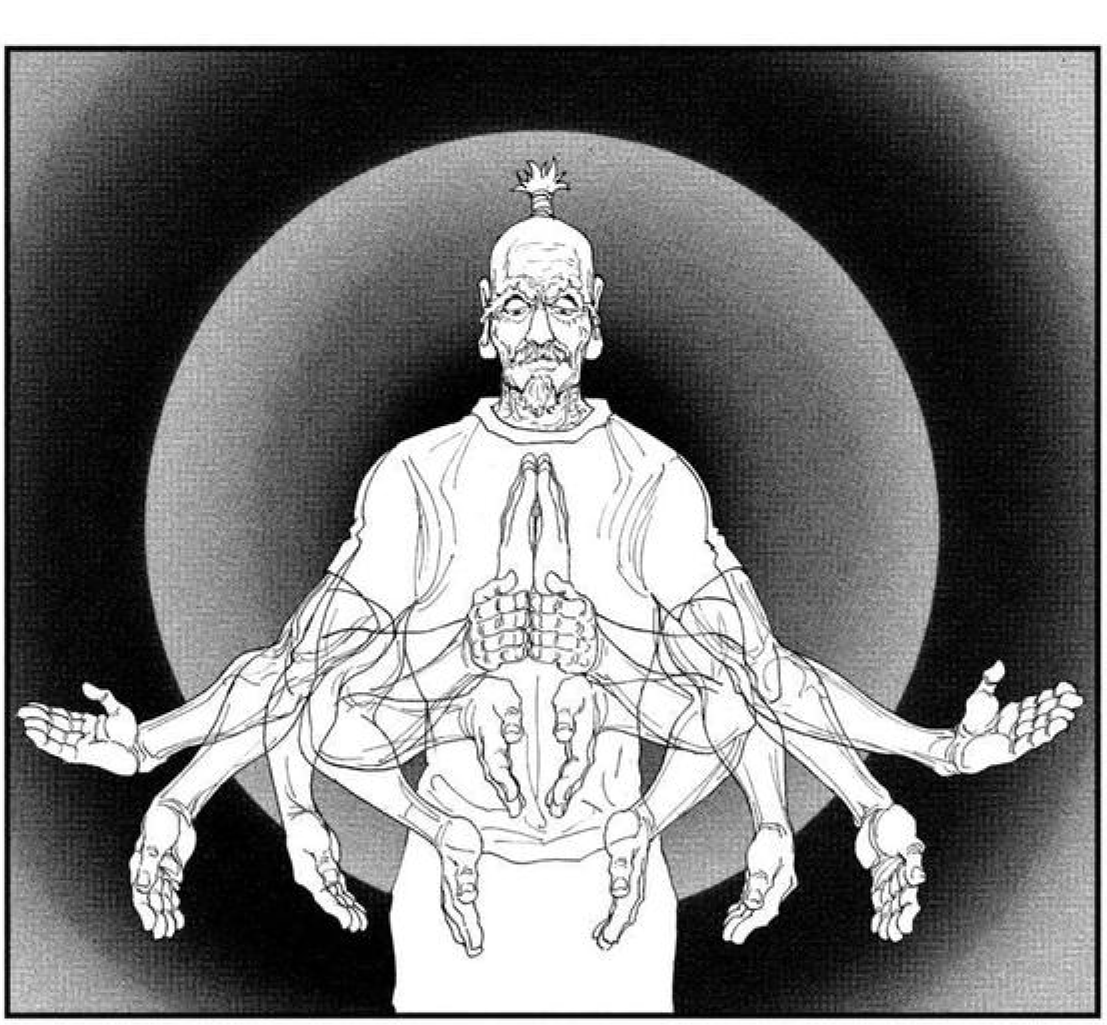
READ THIS WAY


...
I'M OUT ...
I JUST WANTED TO TELL YOU SOMETHING.
I SAW YOU MIDWAY THROUGH...
...BUT I WANTED TO SAVE YOU FOR LAST.
HF
HF
HF
...
HAVING LEARNED TO COMPARTMENTALIZE HIS RAGE, YOUPI WAS CLEAR-HEADED.
HMPH.
YOU'RE A HALF-DEAD FLY.
HE HAD SHOWN ASTONISHING GROWTH DURING COMBAT, FAR BEYOND MOREL AND THE OTHERS.

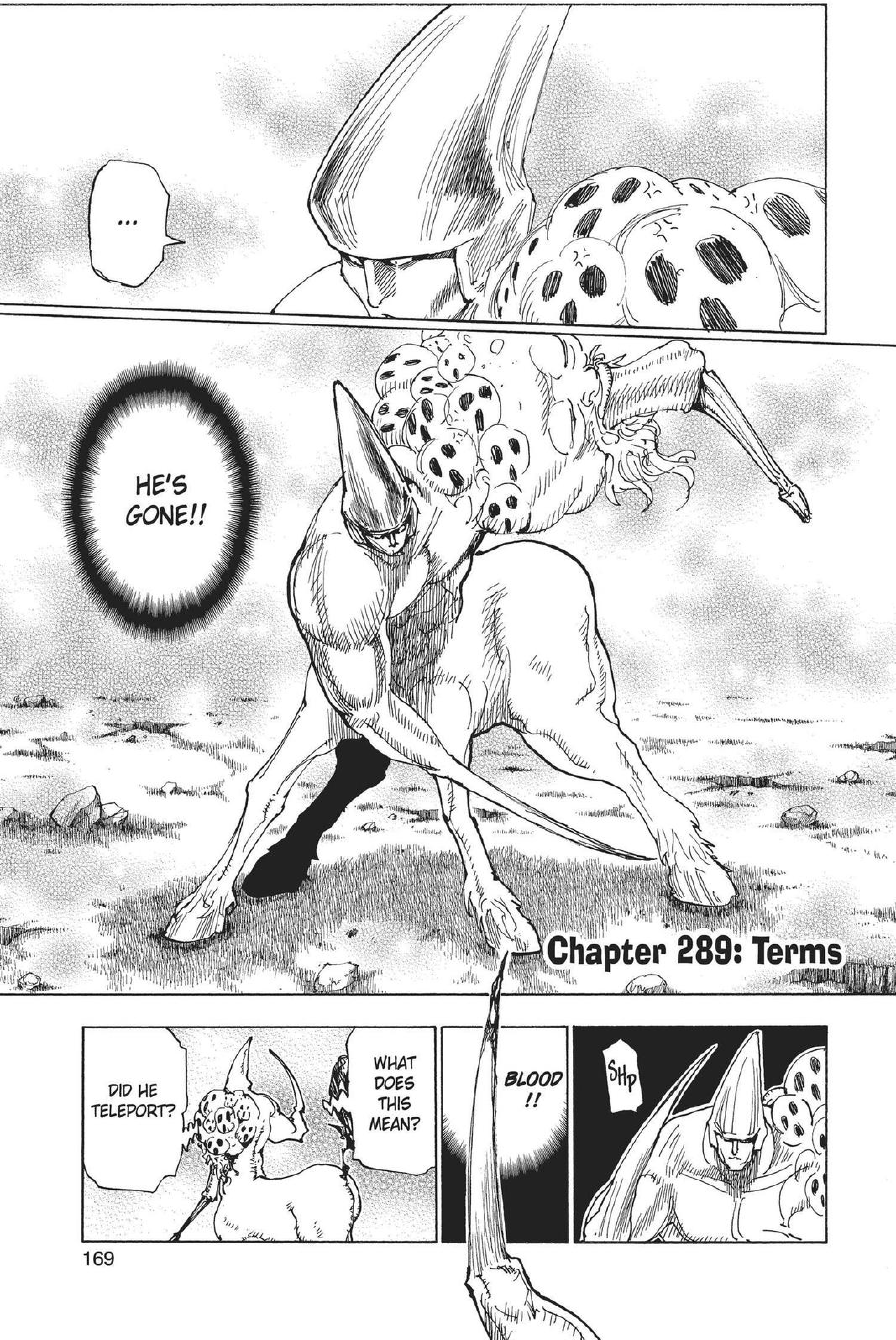

BUT...
...YOU GUYS ARE...
...AMAZING.
BUT WHEN HE SPOKE...
...HE SPOKE WORDS OF *ADMIRATION.*
...
DUNNO HOW TO SAY IT.
HEARING THESE WORDS, SO SEEMINGLY OUT OF CHARACTER FOR YOUPI...
...MOREL ACCEPTED THAT THEY WERE YOUPI'S TRUE FEELINGS.

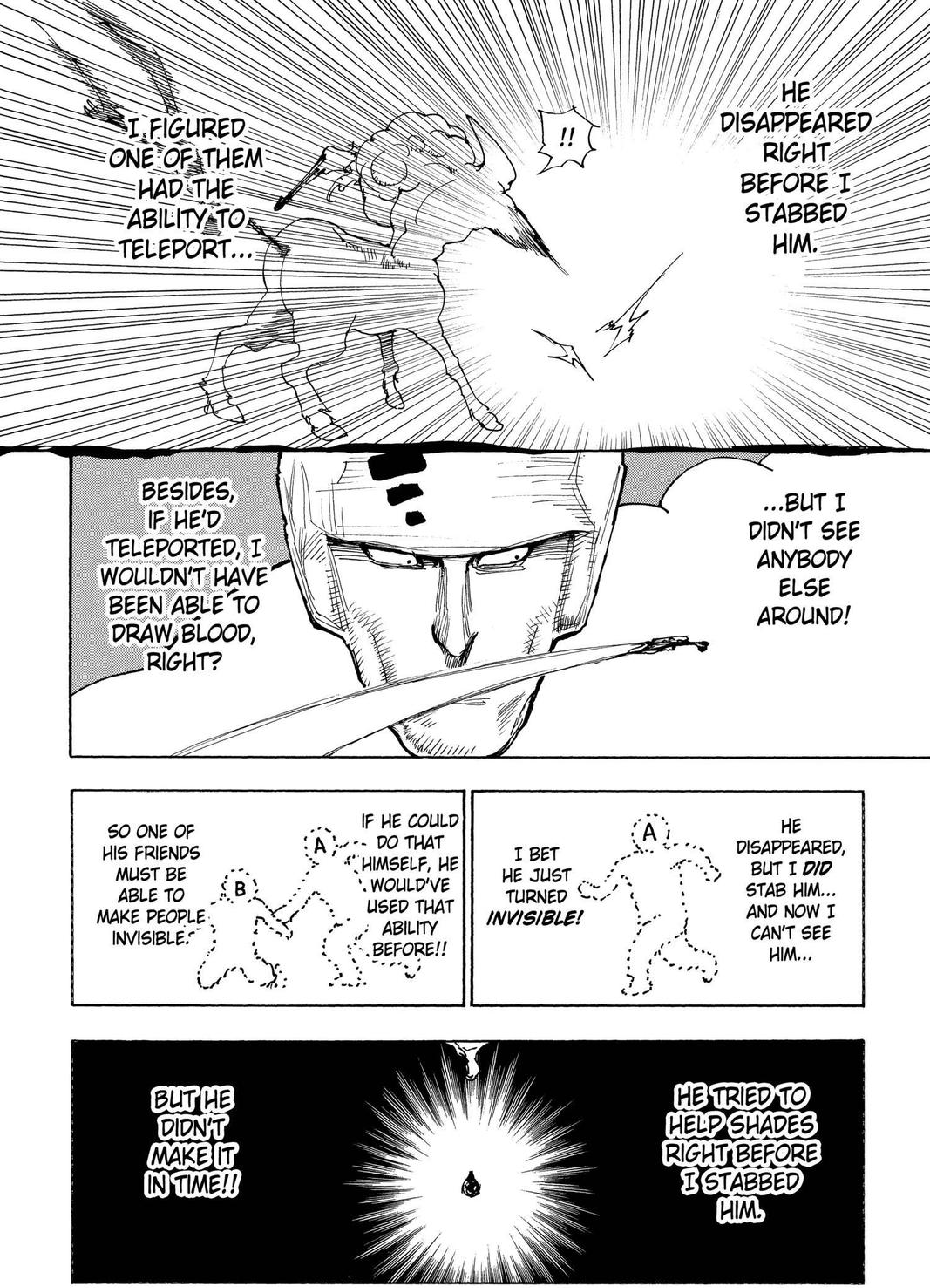
READ THIS WAY

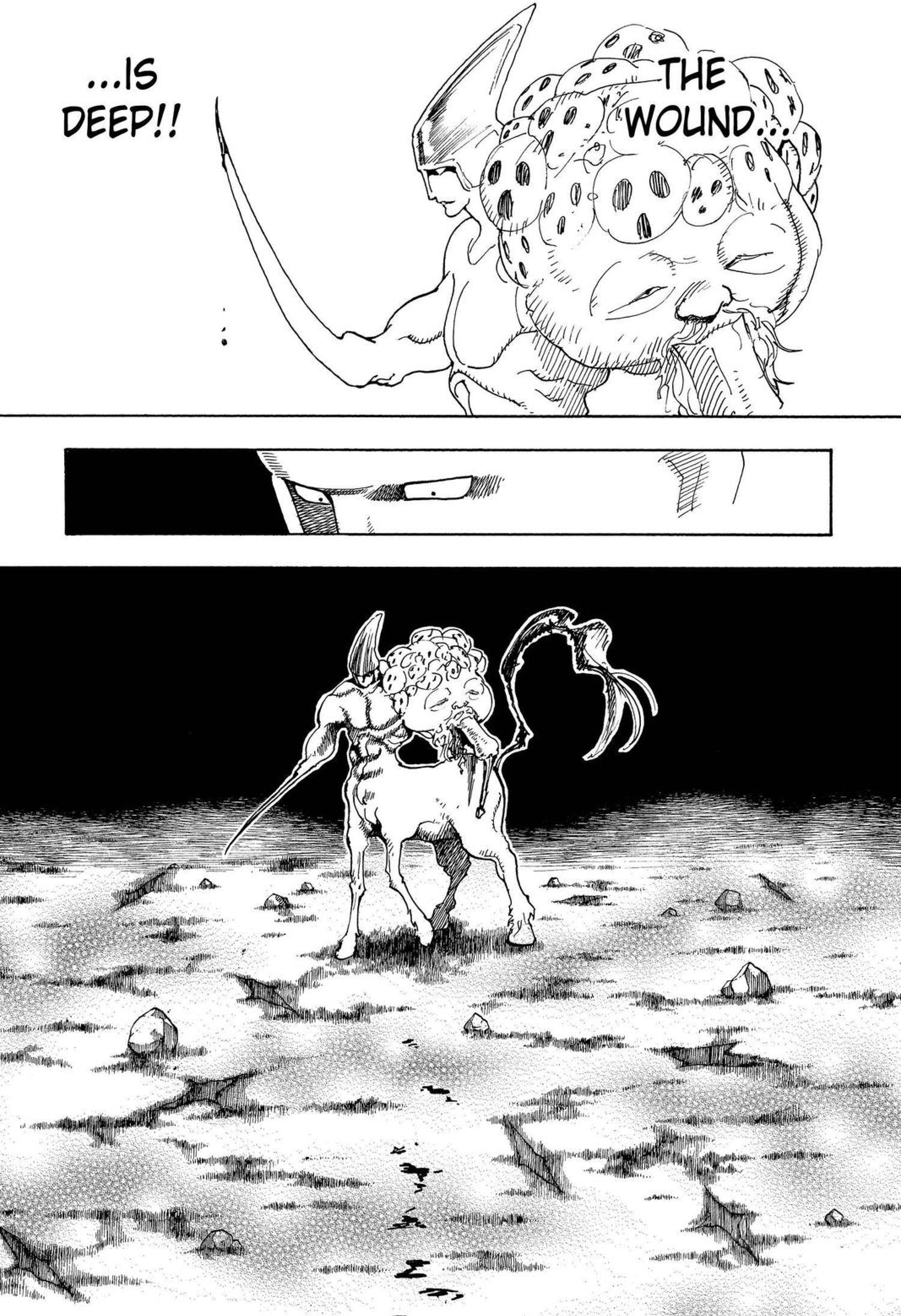

BECAUSE YOU'RE SO AMAZING...
...I'VE GOTTA KILL YOU THE RIGHT WAY.
IT'S THE THING TO DO.
GAME OVER.
I'LL PUT YOU OUT OF YOUR MISERY IN ONE BLOW.
DON'T MOVE, OKAY?
SEE YA.
RIGHT AT THIS MOMENT...
...I DON'T MIND BEING KILLED BY HIM...
FIT
THNK

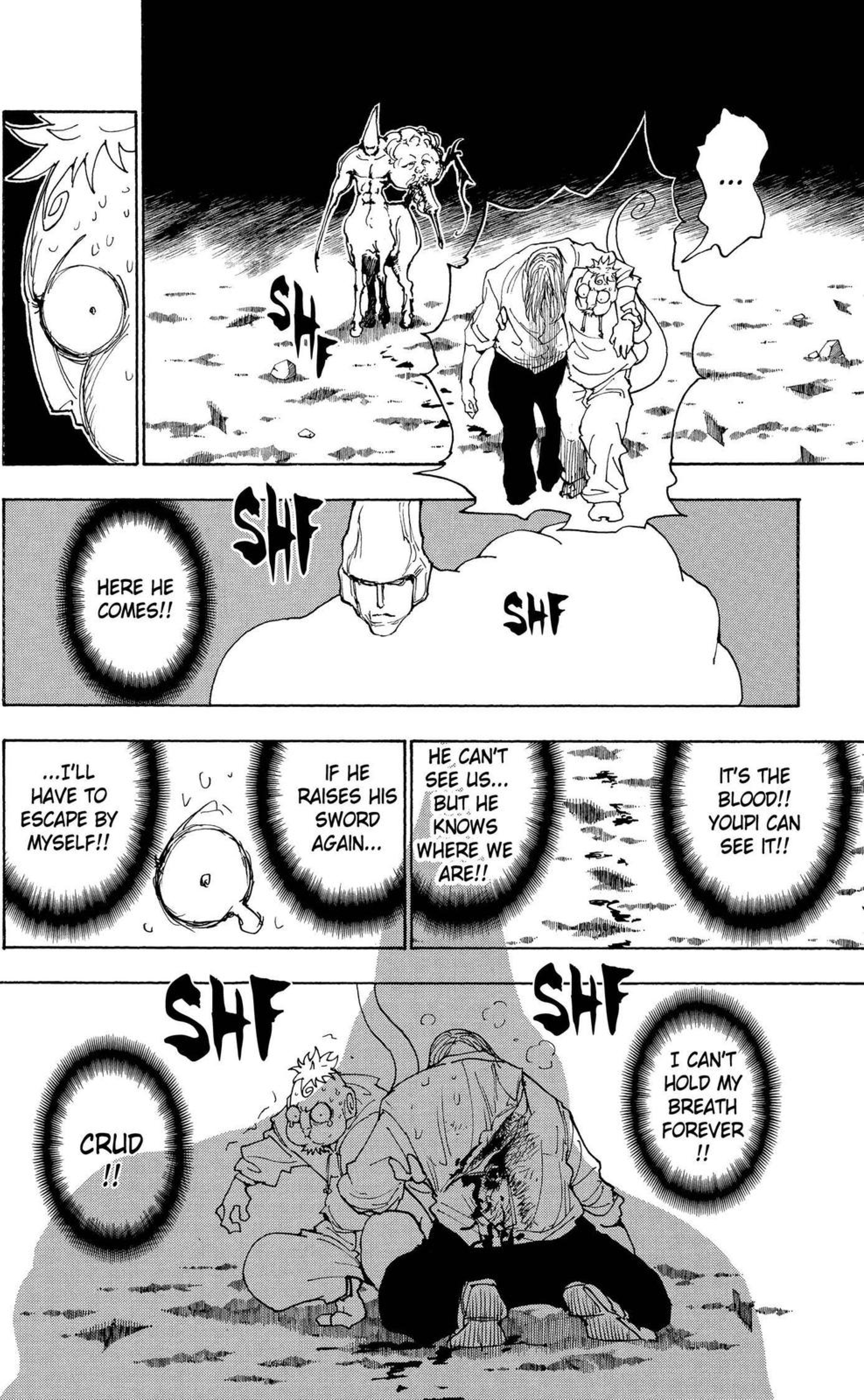


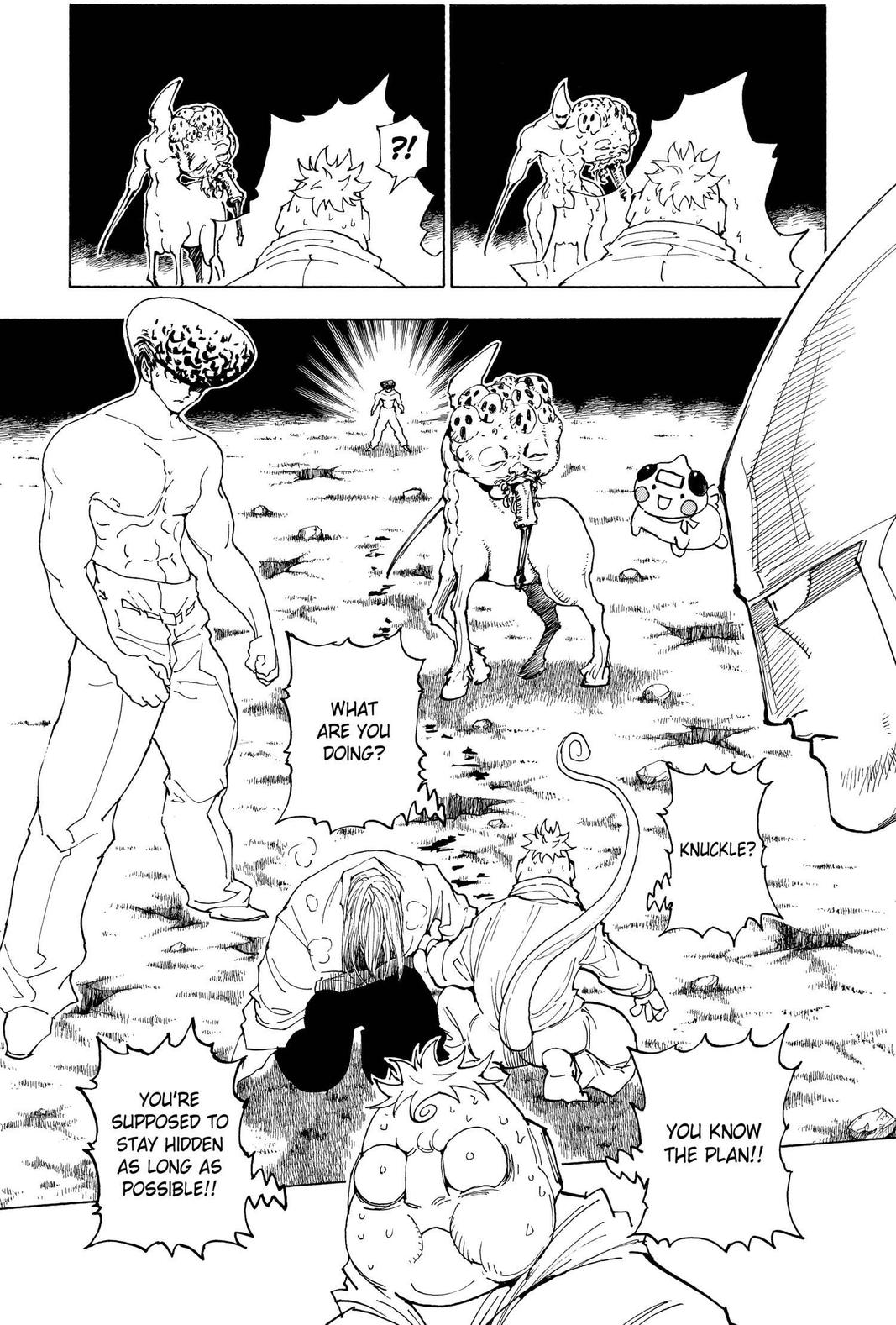
Chapter 289: Terms

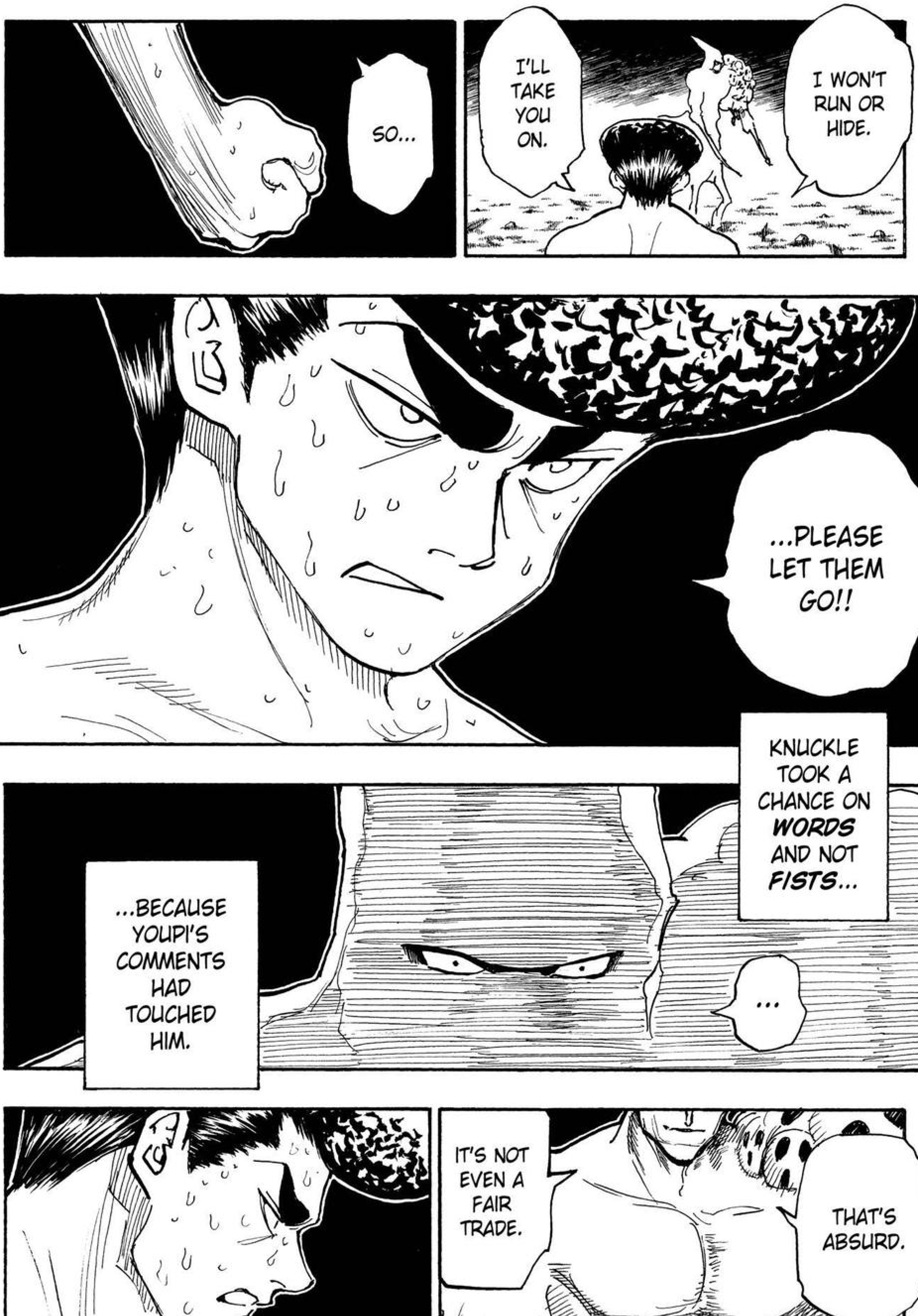

...
HE'S GONE!!
SHp
BLOOD !!
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?
DID HE TELEPORT?

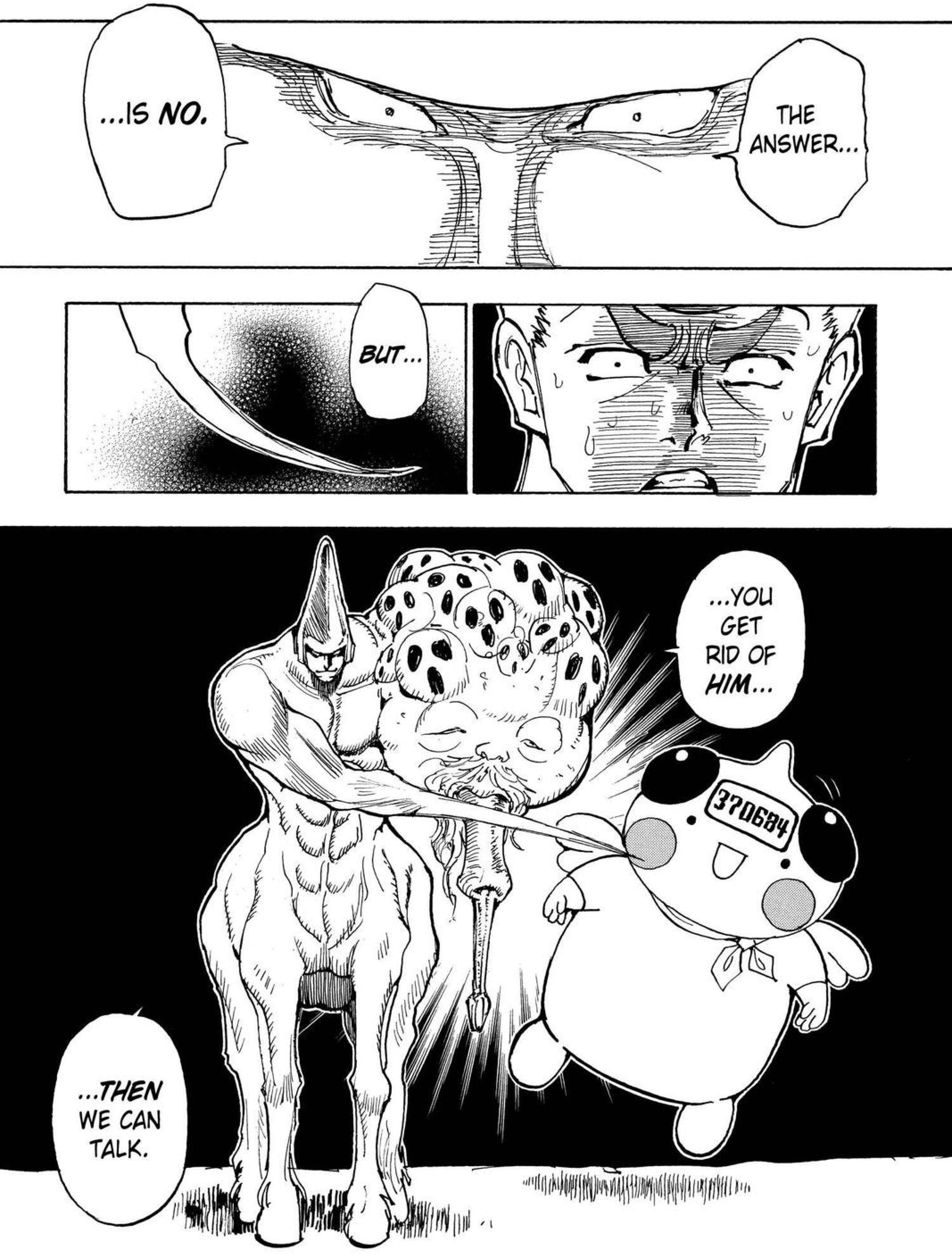

HE DISAPPEARED RIGHT BEFORE I STABBED HIM.
!!
I FIGURED ONE OF THEM HAD THE ABILITY TO TELEPORT...
...BUT I DIDN'T SEE ANYBODY ELSE AROUND!
BESIDES, IF HE'D TELEPORTED, I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DRAW BLOOD, RIGHT?
HE DISAPPEARED, BUT I *DID* STAB HIM... AND NOW I CAN'T SEE HIM...
A
I BET HE JUST TURNED ***INVISIBLE!***
IF HE COULD DO THAT HIMSELF, HE WOULD'VE USED THAT ABILITY BEFORE!!
A
B
SO ONE OF HIS FRIENDS MUST BE ABLE TO MAKE PEOPLE INVISIBLE.
HE TRIED TO HELP SHADES RIGHT BEFORE I STABBED HIM.
BUT HE DIDN'T MAKE IT IN TIME!!

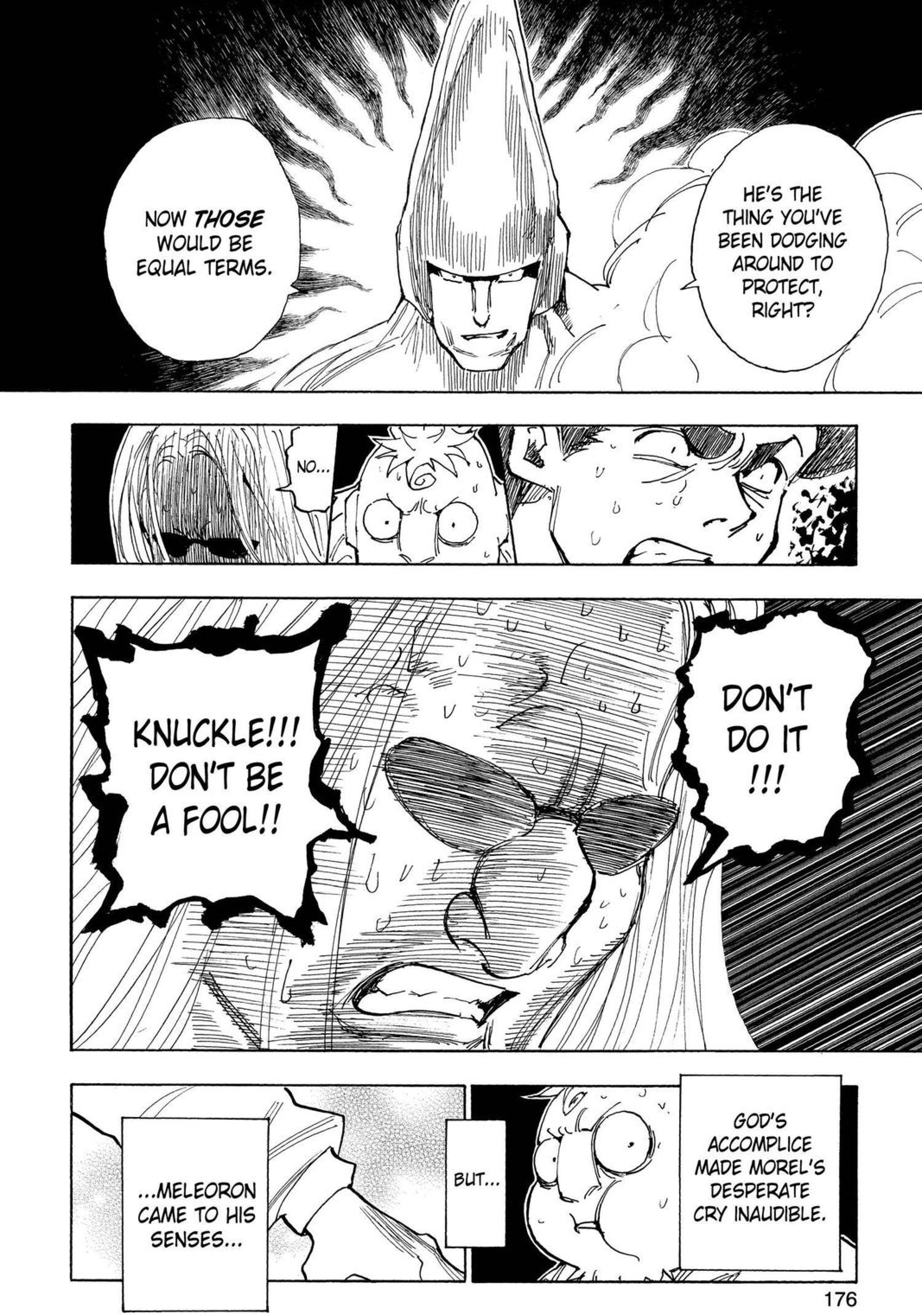

THE WOUND...
...IS DEEP!!

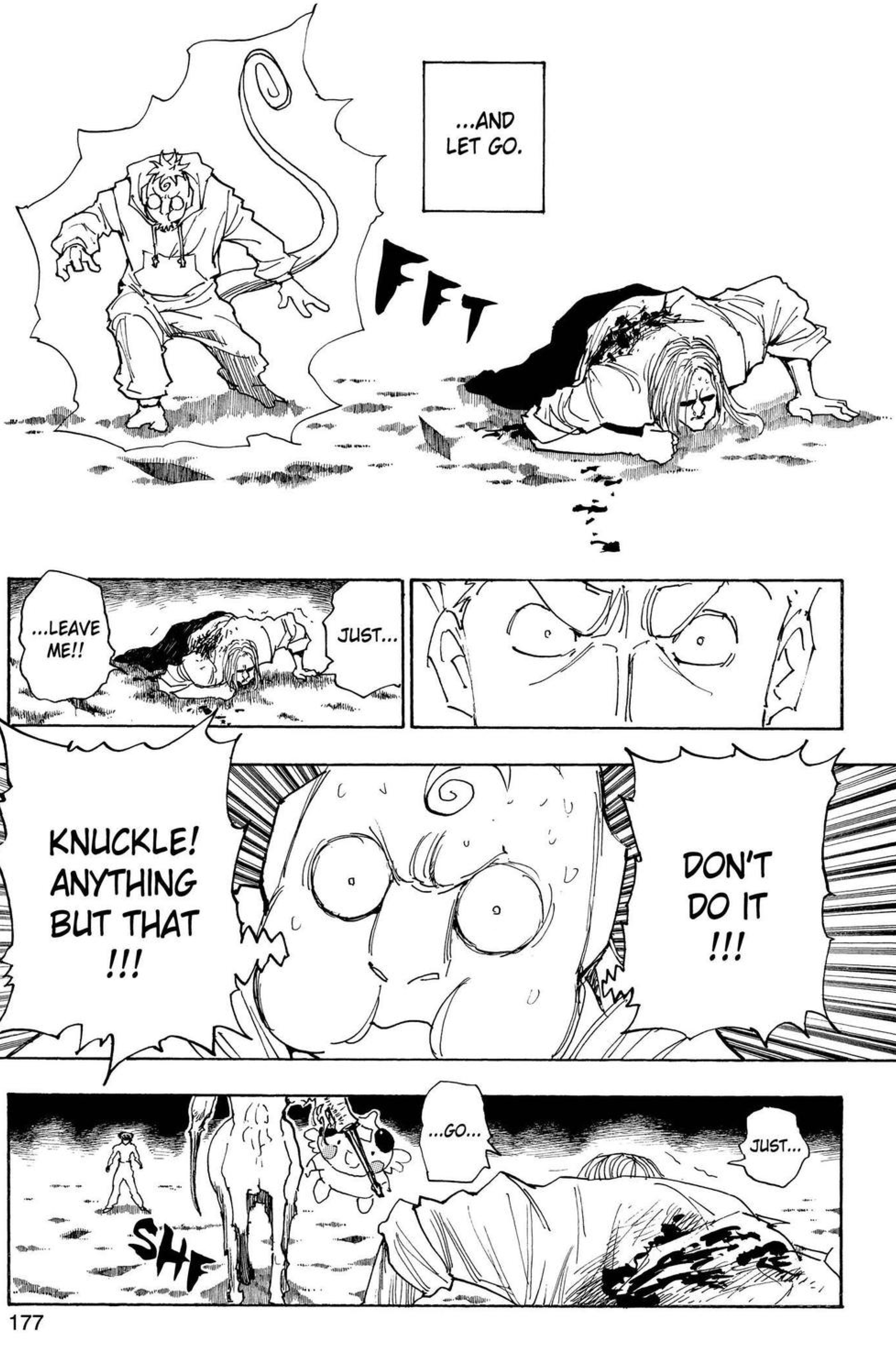

...
SHF
SHF
HERE HE COMES!!
SHF
IT'S THE BLOOD!! YOUPI CAN SEE IT!!
HE CAN'T SEE US... BUT HE KNOWS WHERE WE ARE!!
IF HE RAISES HIS SWORD AGAIN...
...I'LL HAVE TO ESCAPE BY MYSELF!!
SHF
SHF
I CAN'T HOLD MY BREATH FOREVER!!
CRUD!!

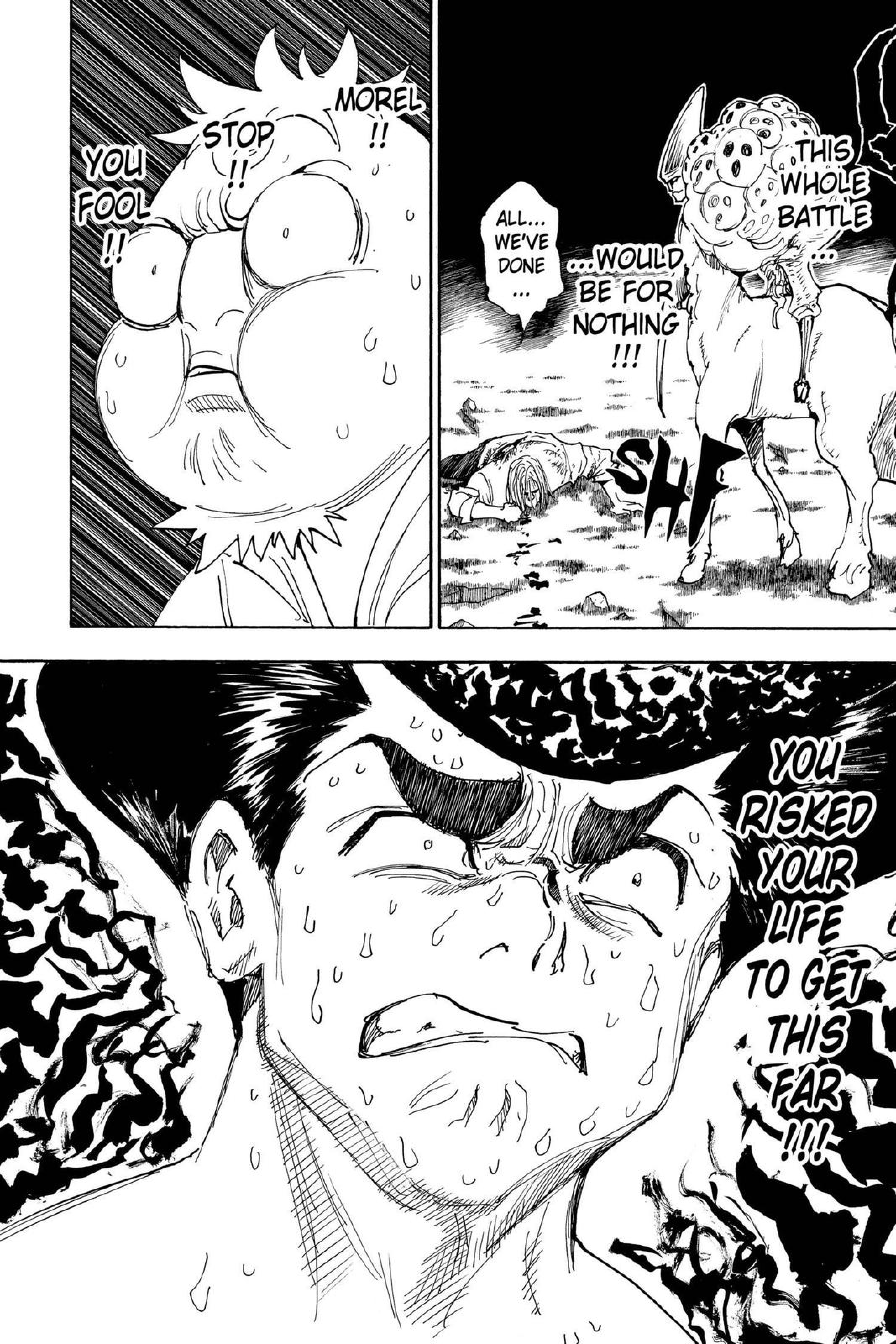

?!
KNUCKLE?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
YOU KNOW THE PLAN!!
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO STAY HIDDEN AS LONG AS POSSIBLE!!

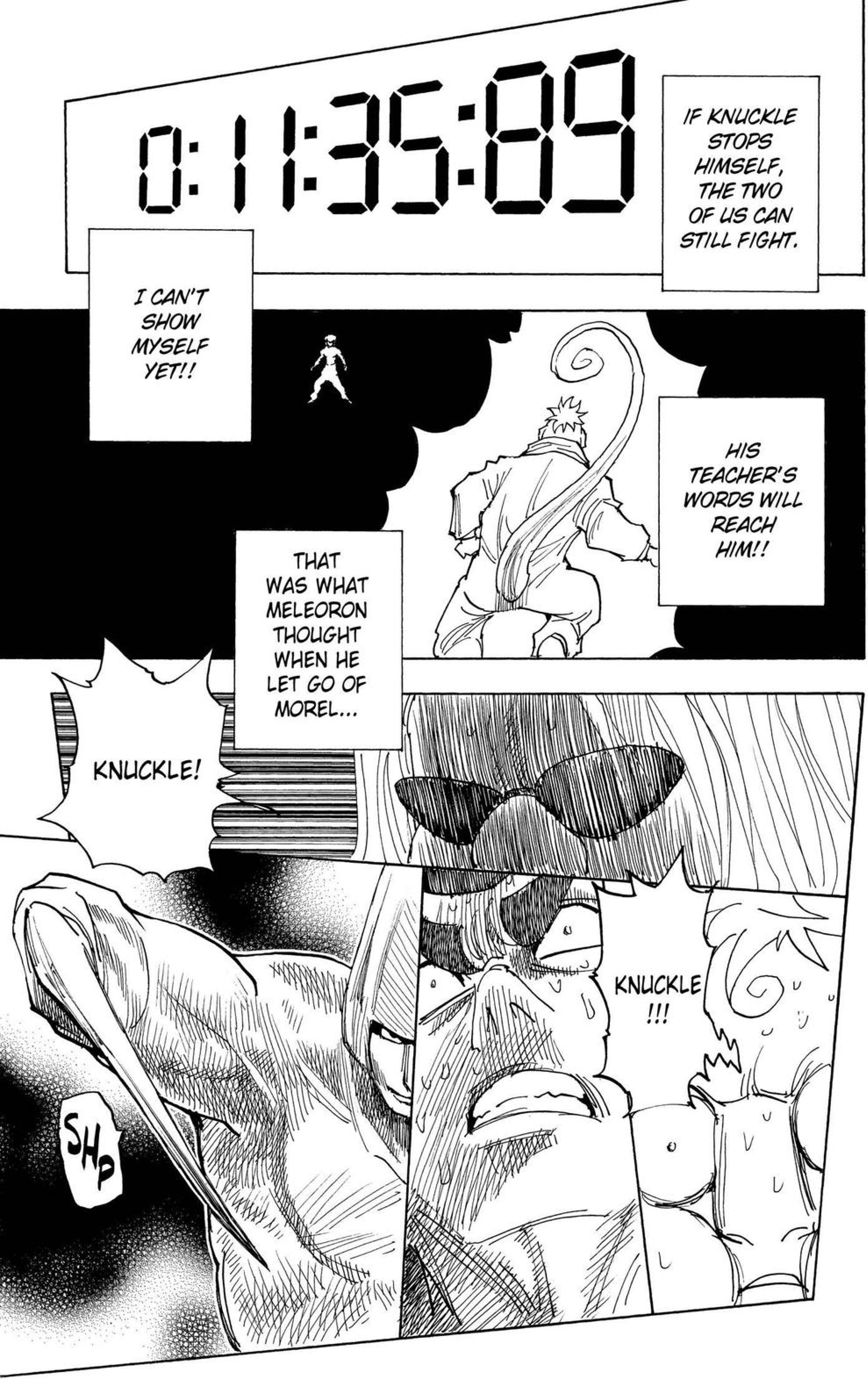

I WON'T RUN OR HIDE.
I'LL TAKE YOU ON.
SO...
...PLEASE LET THEM GO!!
KNUCKLE TOOK A CHANCE ON **WORDS** AND NOT **FISTS**...
...
...BECAUSE YOUPI'S COMMENTS HAD TOUCHED HIM.
THAT'S ABSURD.
IT'S NOT EVEN A FAIR TRADE.

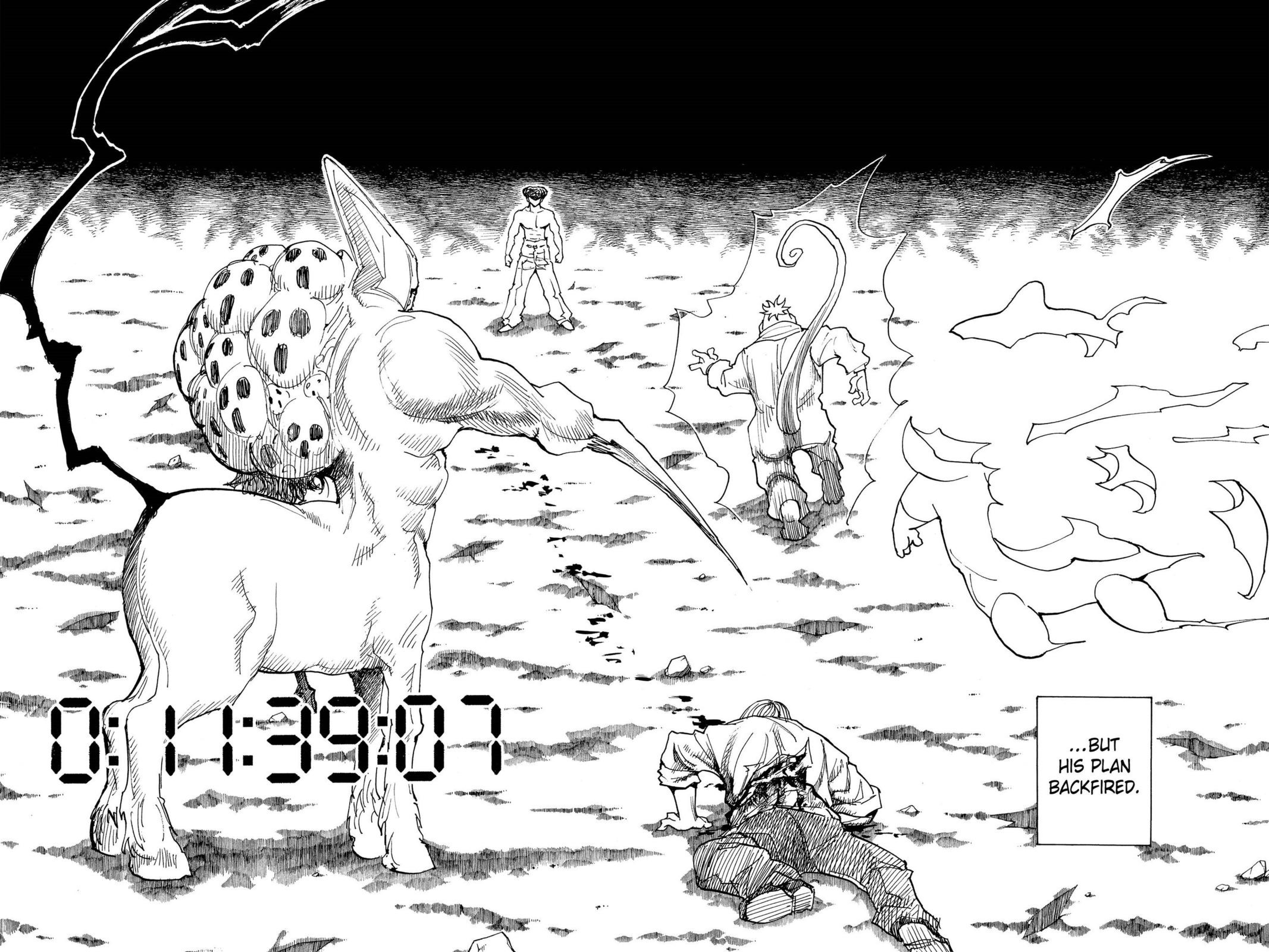

THE ANSWER...
...IS **NO.**
BUT...
...YOU GET RID OF ***HIM...***
370684
...THEN WE CAN TALK.

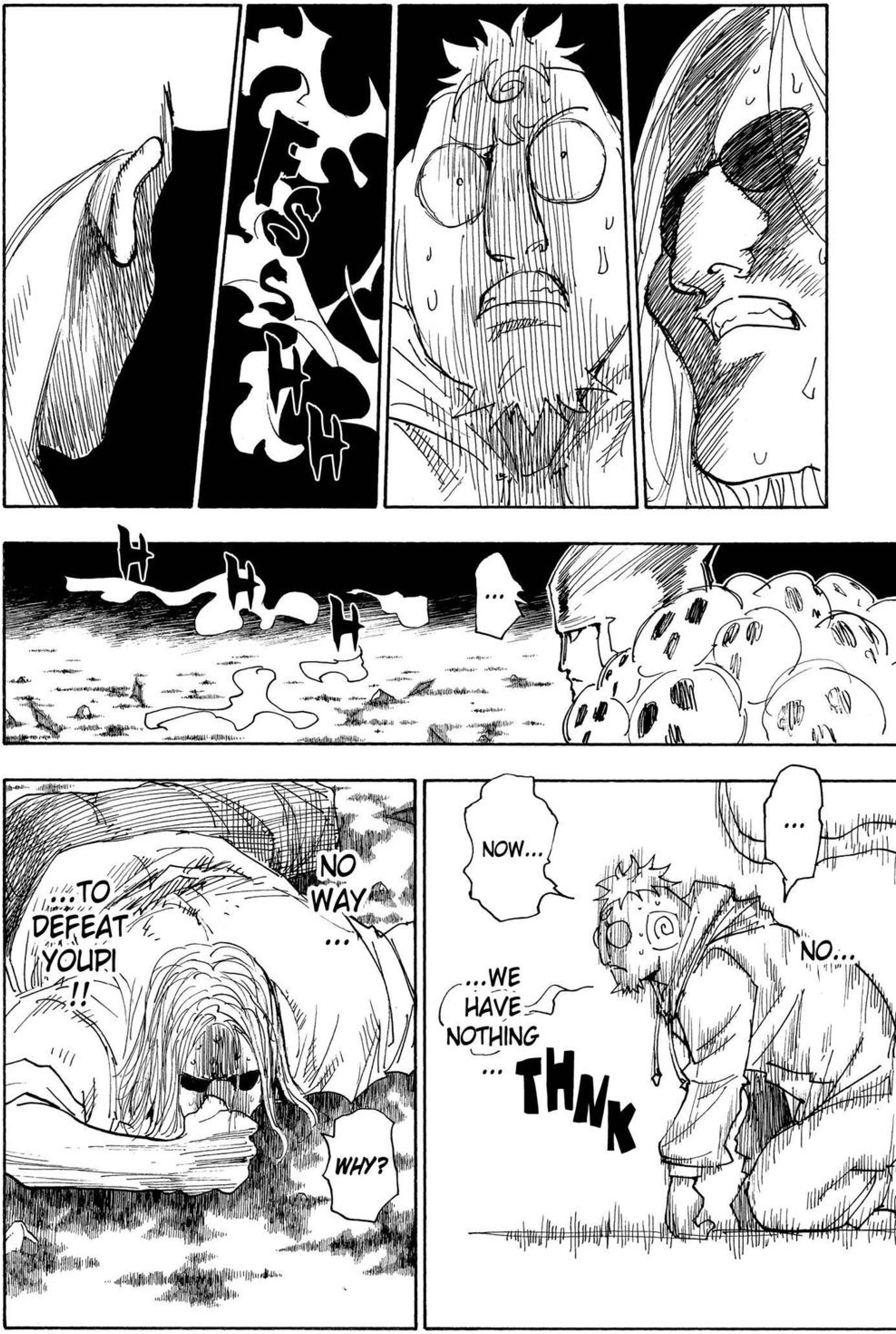

HE'S THE THING YOU'VE BEEN DODGING AROUND TO PROTECT, RIGHT?
NOW *THOSE* WOULD BE EQUAL TERMS.
NO...
DON'T DO IT !!!
KNUCKLE!!! DON'T BE A FOOL!!
...MELEORON CAME TO HIS SENSES...
BUT...
GOD'S ACCOMPLICE MADE MOREL'S DESPERATE CRY INAUDIBLE.

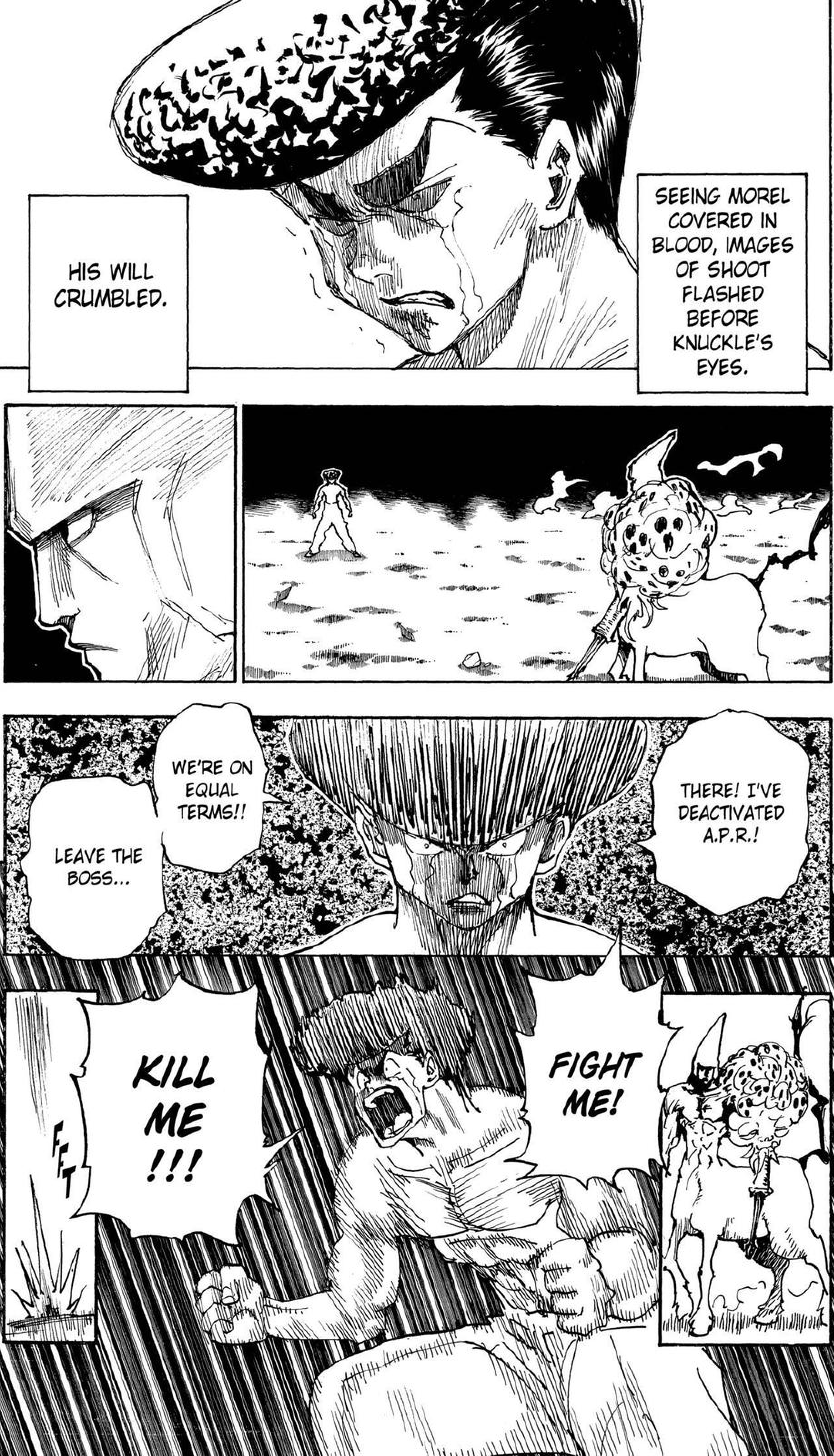

...AND LET GO.
FFT
JUST...
...LEAVE ME!!
DON'T DO IT !!!
KNUCKLE! ANYTHING BUT THAT !!!
JUST...
...GO...
SHF

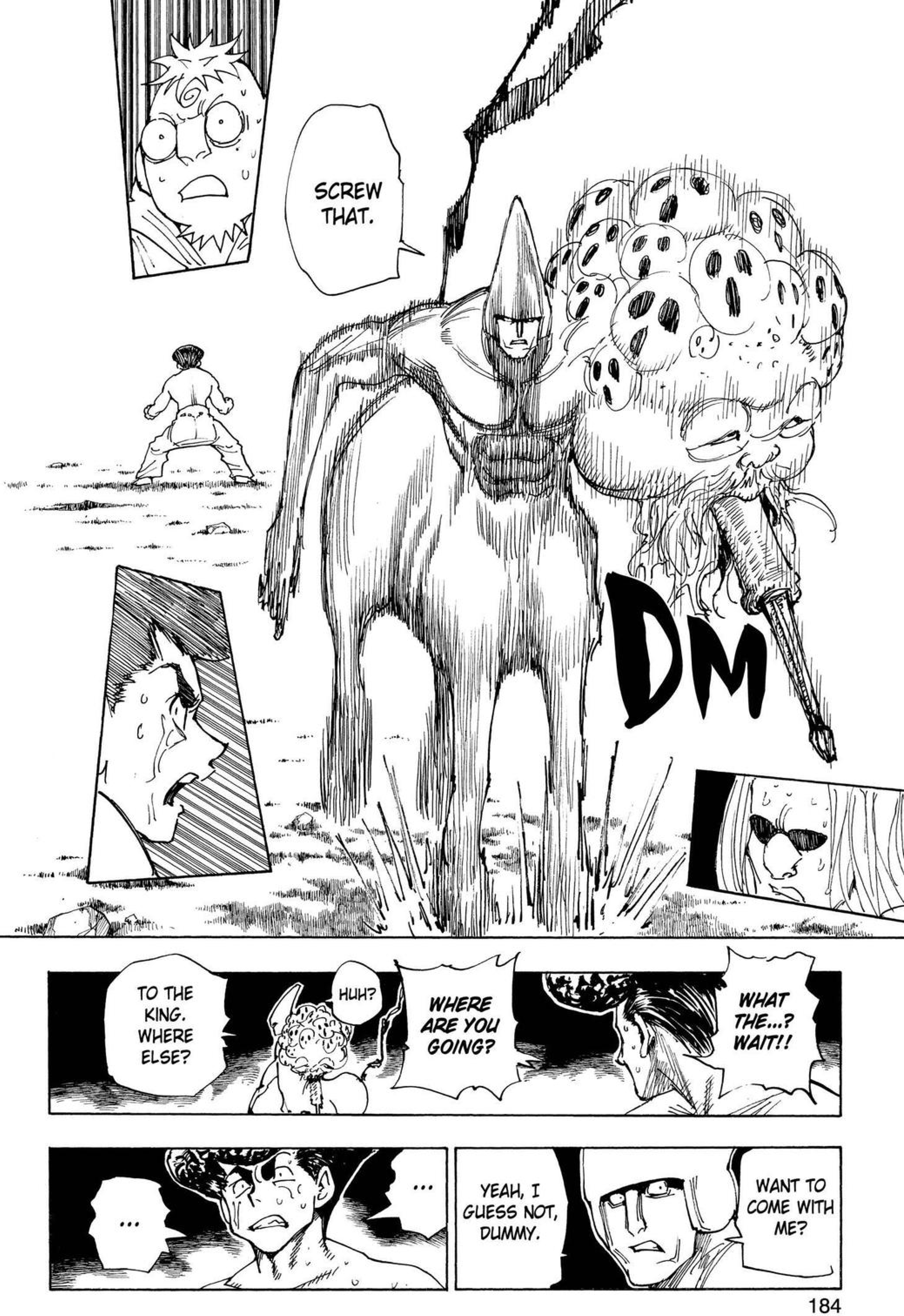

THIS WHOLE BATTLE …
…WOULD BE FOR NOTHING !!!
ALL… WE'VE DONE …
SHF
MOREL !!
STOP !!
YOU FOOL !!
YOU RISKED YOUR LIFE TO GET THIS FAR !!!

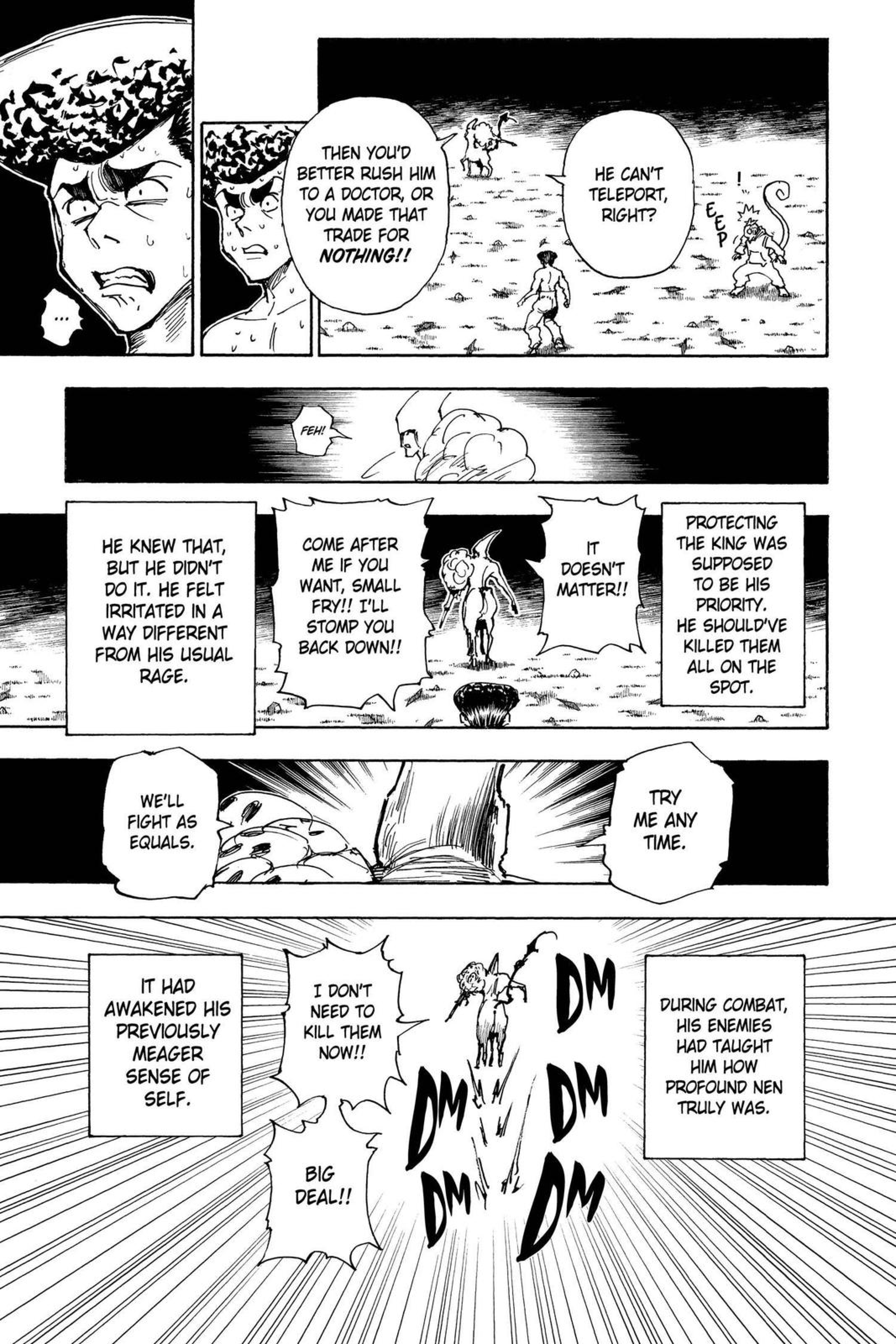

0:11:35:89
IF KNUCKLE STOPS HIMSELF, THE TWO OF US CAN STILL FIGHT.
I CAN'T SHOW MYSELF YET!!
HIS TEACHER'S WORDS WILL REACH HIM!!
THAT WAS WHAT MELEORON THOUGHT WHEN HE LET GO OF MOREL...
KNUCKLE!
KNUCKLE !!!
SHP

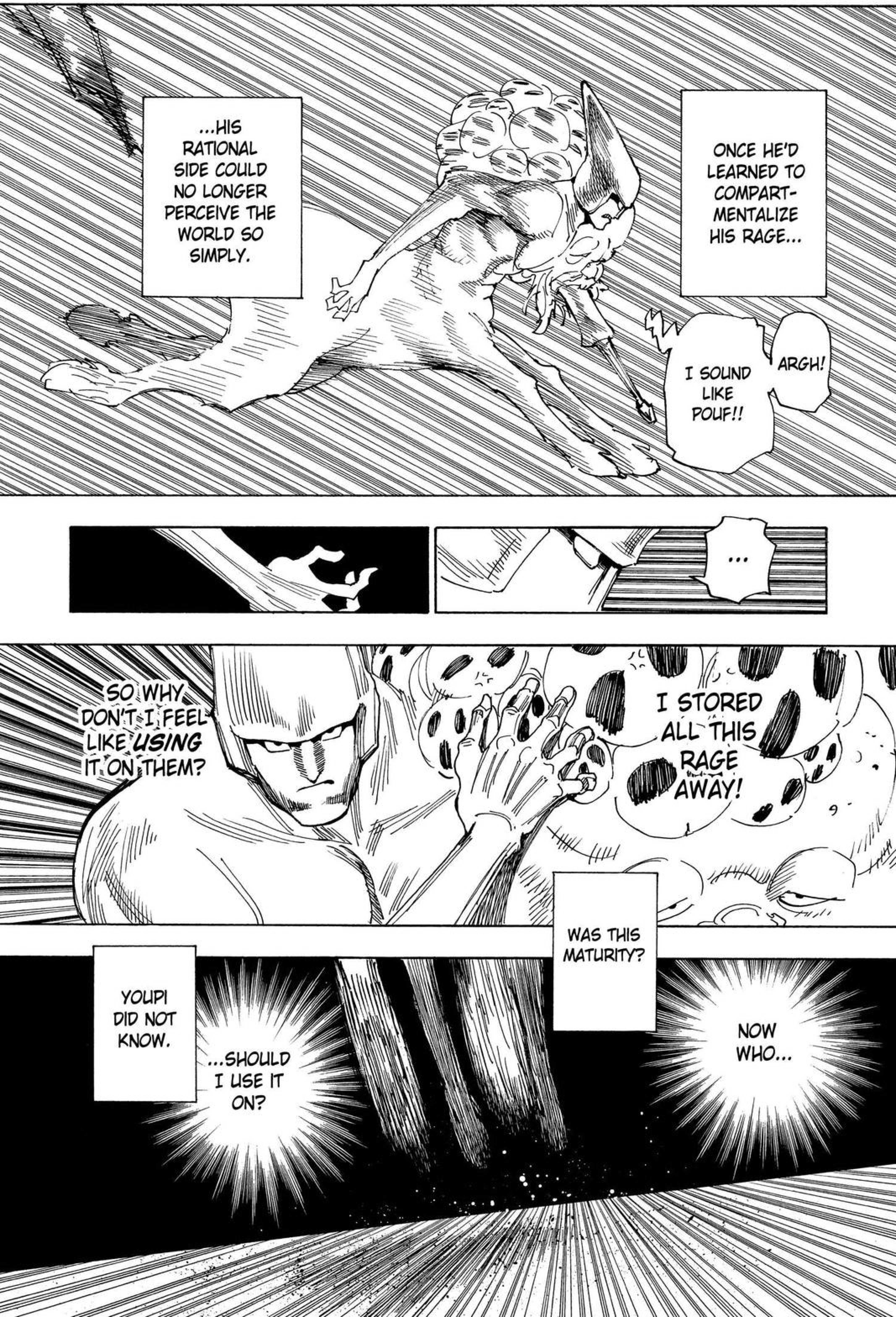

0:11:39:07
...BUT HIS PLAN BACKFIRED.

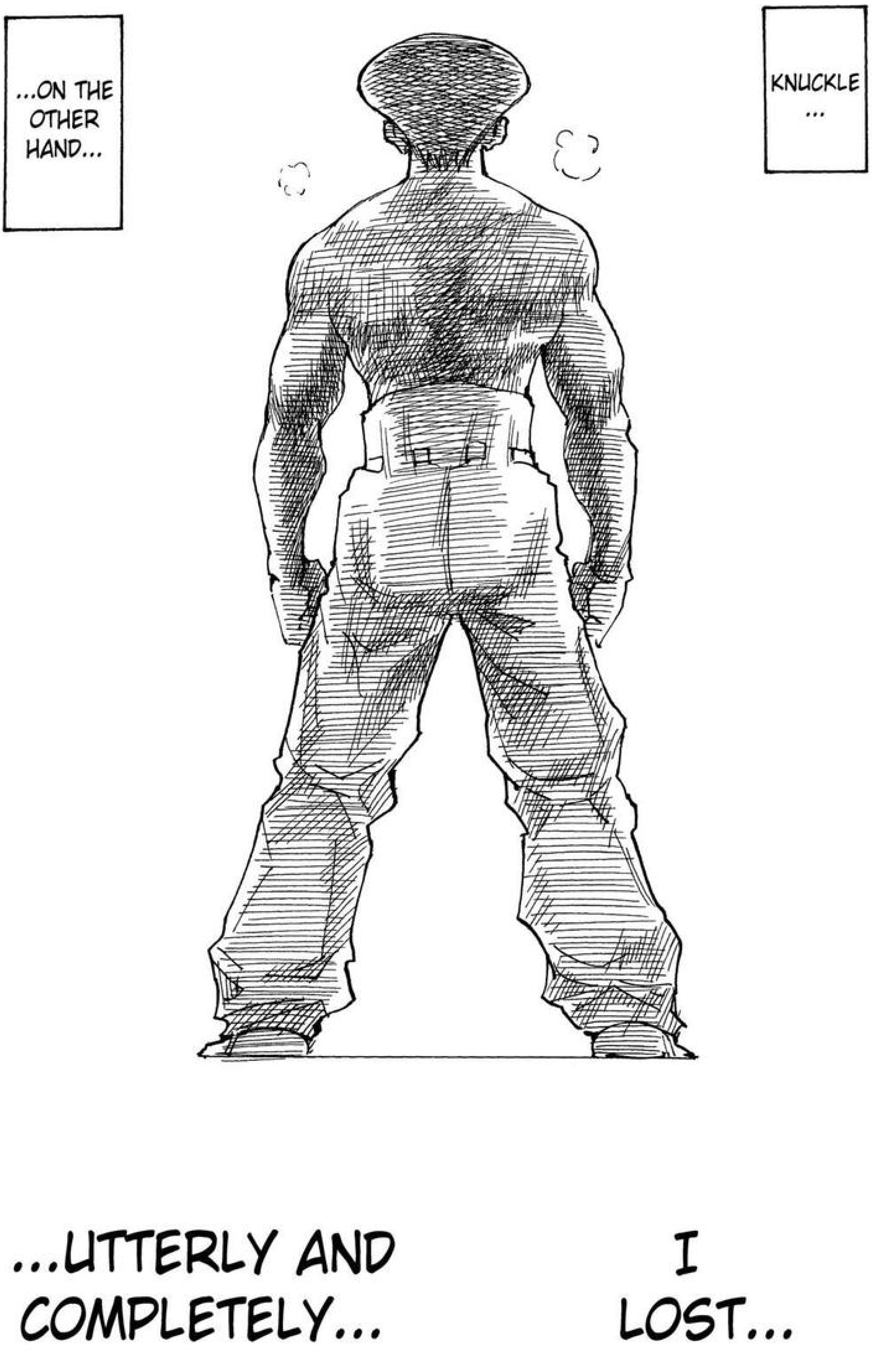

FSSHH
…
H H H
…
NO…
NOW…
…WE HAVE NOTHING…
THNK
NO WAY…
…TO DEFEAT YOUPI!!
WHY?


SEEING MOREL COVERED IN BLOOD, IMAGES OF SHOOT FLASHED BEFORE KNUCKLE'S EYES.
HIS WILL CRUMBLED.
THERE! I'VE DEACTIVATED A.P.R.!
WE'RE ON EQUAL TERMS!!
LEAVE THE BOSS...
FIGHT ME!
KILL ME !!!
FFT


SCREW THAT.
DM
WHAT THE...? WAIT!!
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
HUH?
TO THE KING. WHERE ELSE?
WANT TO COME WITH ME?
YEAH, I GUESS NOT, DUMMY.
...
...


!
EEP
HE CAN'T TELEPORT, RIGHT?
THEN YOU'D BETTER RUSH HIM TO A DOCTOR, OR YOU MADE THAT TRADE FOR ***NOTHING!!***
...
FEH!
PROTECTING THE KING WAS SUPPOSED TO BE HIS PRIORITY. HE SHOULD'VE KILLED THEM ALL ON THE SPOT.
IT DOESN'T MATTER!!
COME AFTER ME IF YOU WANT, SMALL FRY!! I'LL STOMP YOU BACK DOWN!!
HE KNEW THAT, BUT HE DIDN'T DO IT. HE FELT IRRITATED IN A WAY DIFFERENT FROM HIS USUAL RAGE.
TRY ME ANY TIME.
WE'LL FIGHT AS EQUALS.
DURING COMBAT, HIS ENEMIES HAD TAUGHT HIM HOW PROFOUND NEN TRULY WAS.
DM
DM
DM
DM
DM
I DON'T NEED TO KILL THEM NOW!!
BIG DEAL!!
IT HAD AWAKENED HIS PREVIOUSLY MEAGER SENSE OF SELF.


ONCE HE'D LEARNED TO COMPARTMENTALIZE HIS RAGE...
...HIS RATIONAL SIDE COULD NO LONGER PERCEIVE THE WORLD SO SIMPLY.
ARGH!
I SOUND LIKE POUF!!
...
I STORED ALL THIS RAGE AWAY!
SO WHY DON'T I FEEL LIKE *USING* IT ON THEM?
WAS THIS MATURITY?
NOW WHO...
...SHOULD I USE IT ON?
YOUPI DID NOT KNOW.


KNUCKLE ...
...ON THE OTHER HAND...
I LOST...
...UTTERLY AND COMPLETELY...

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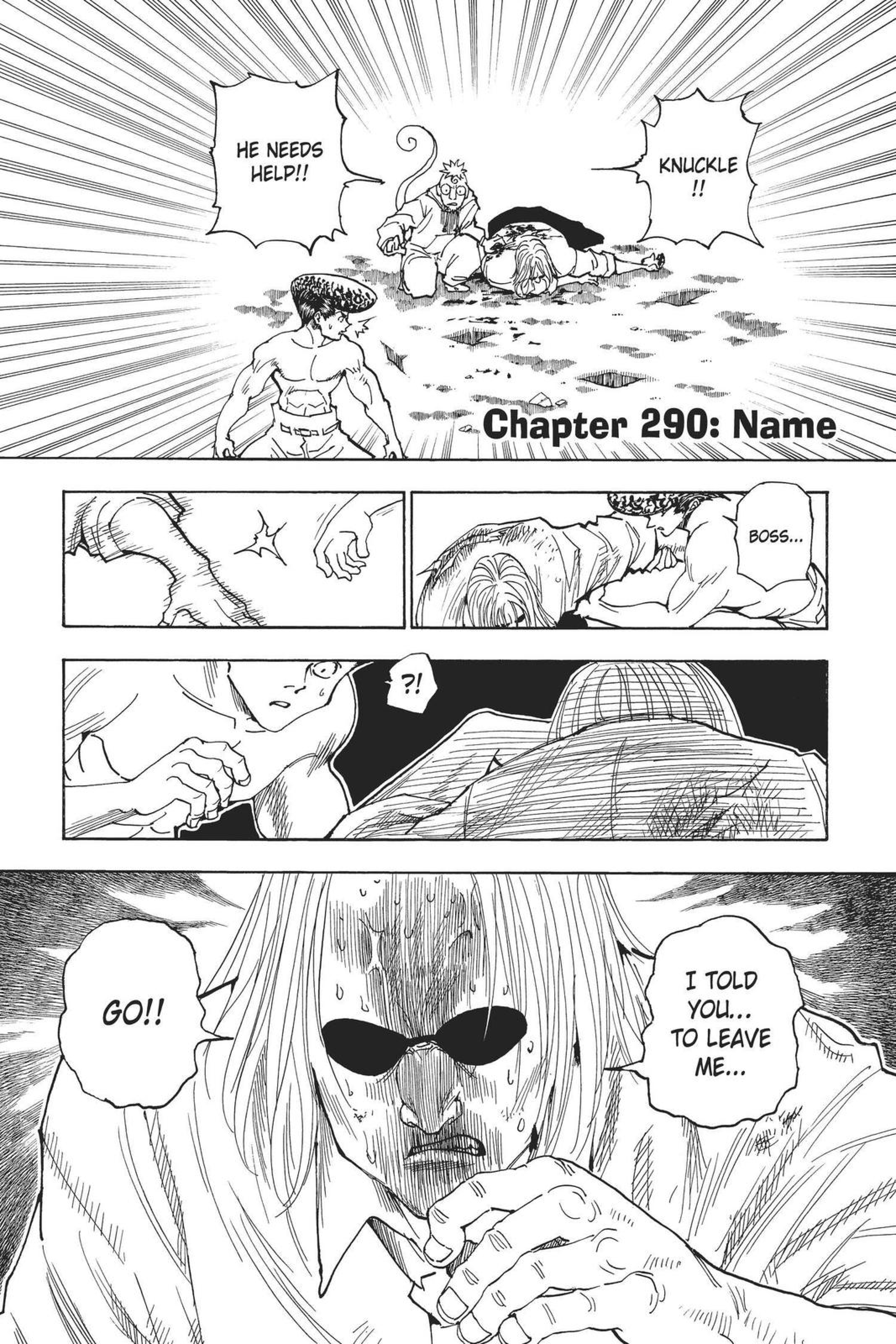
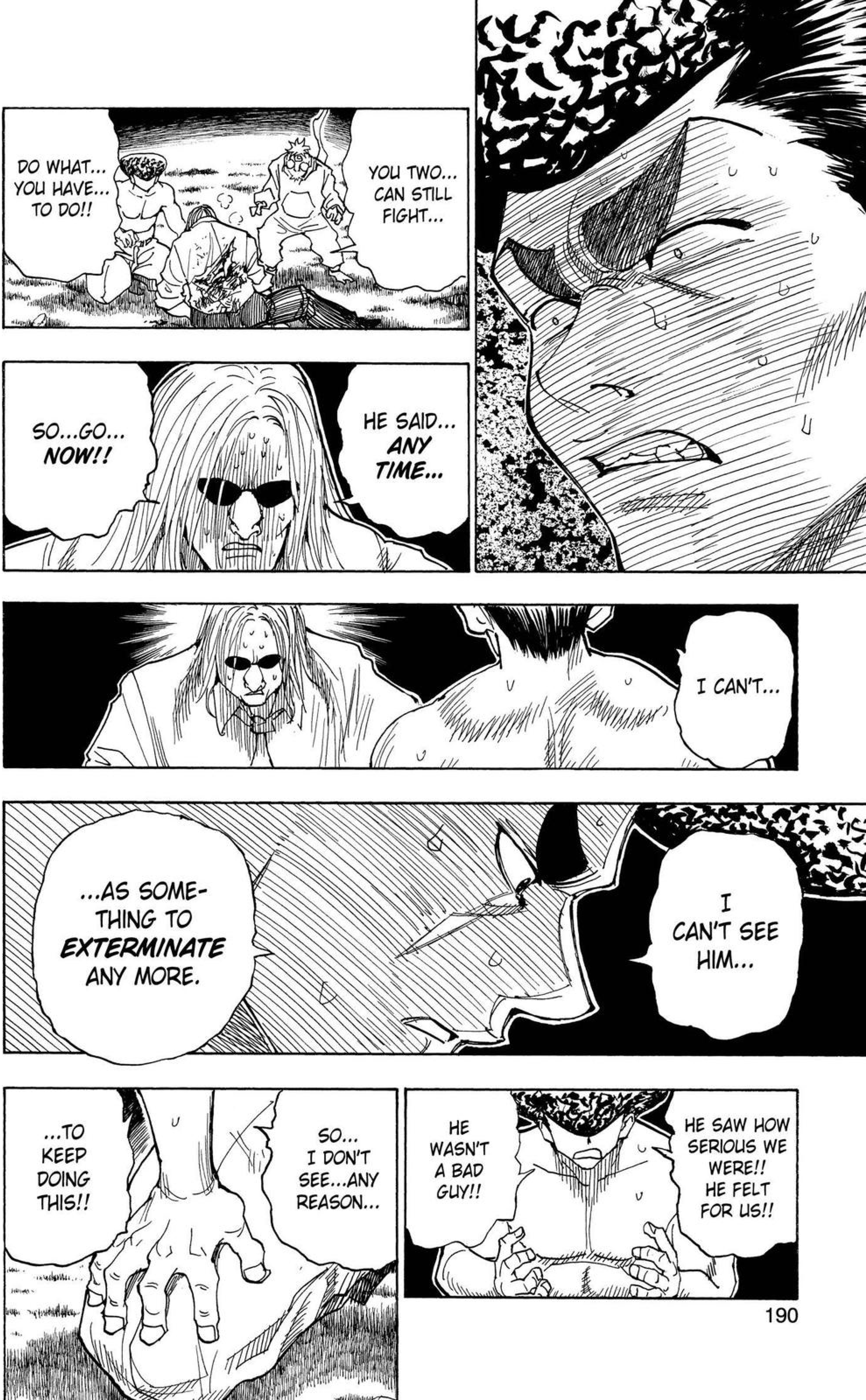
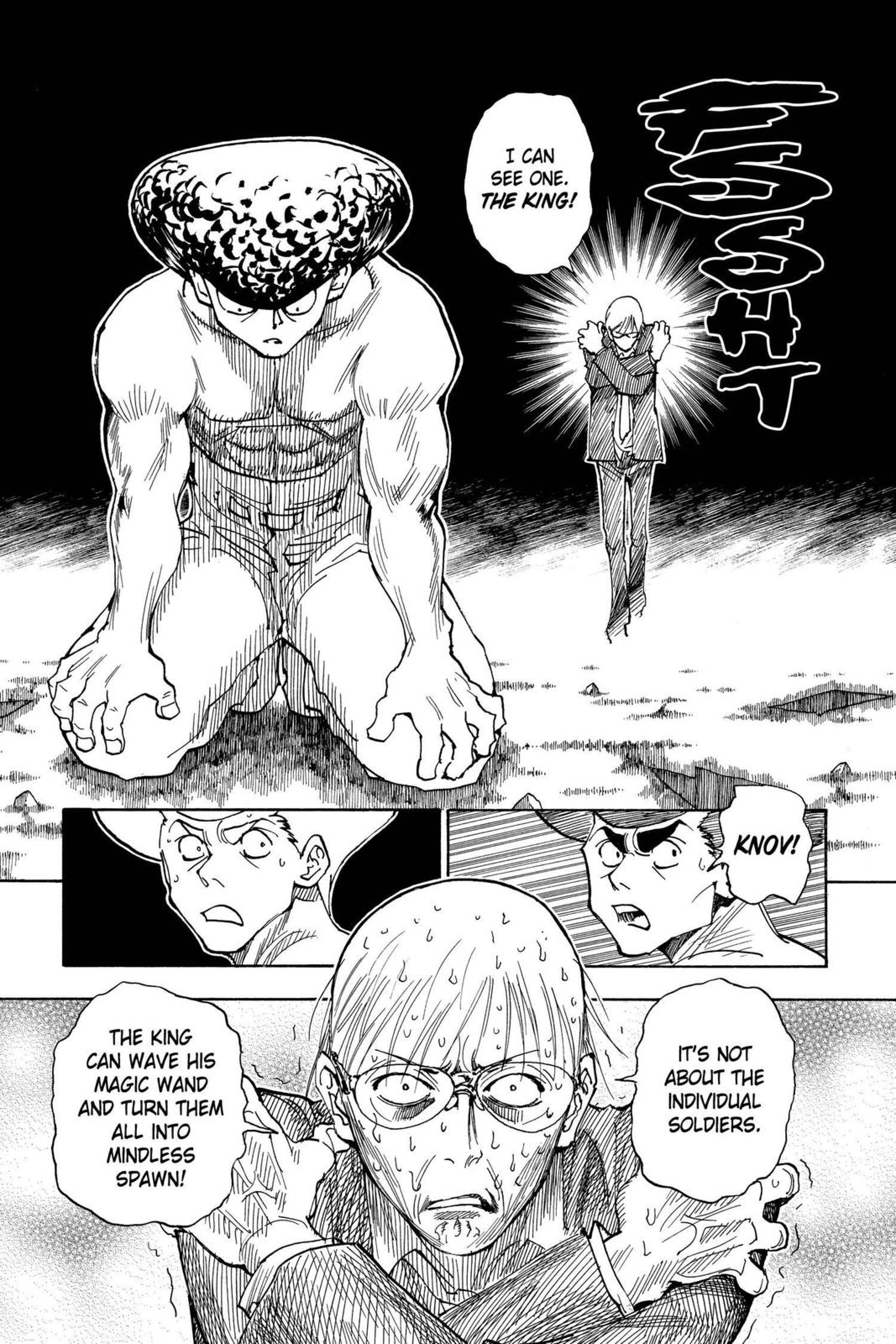
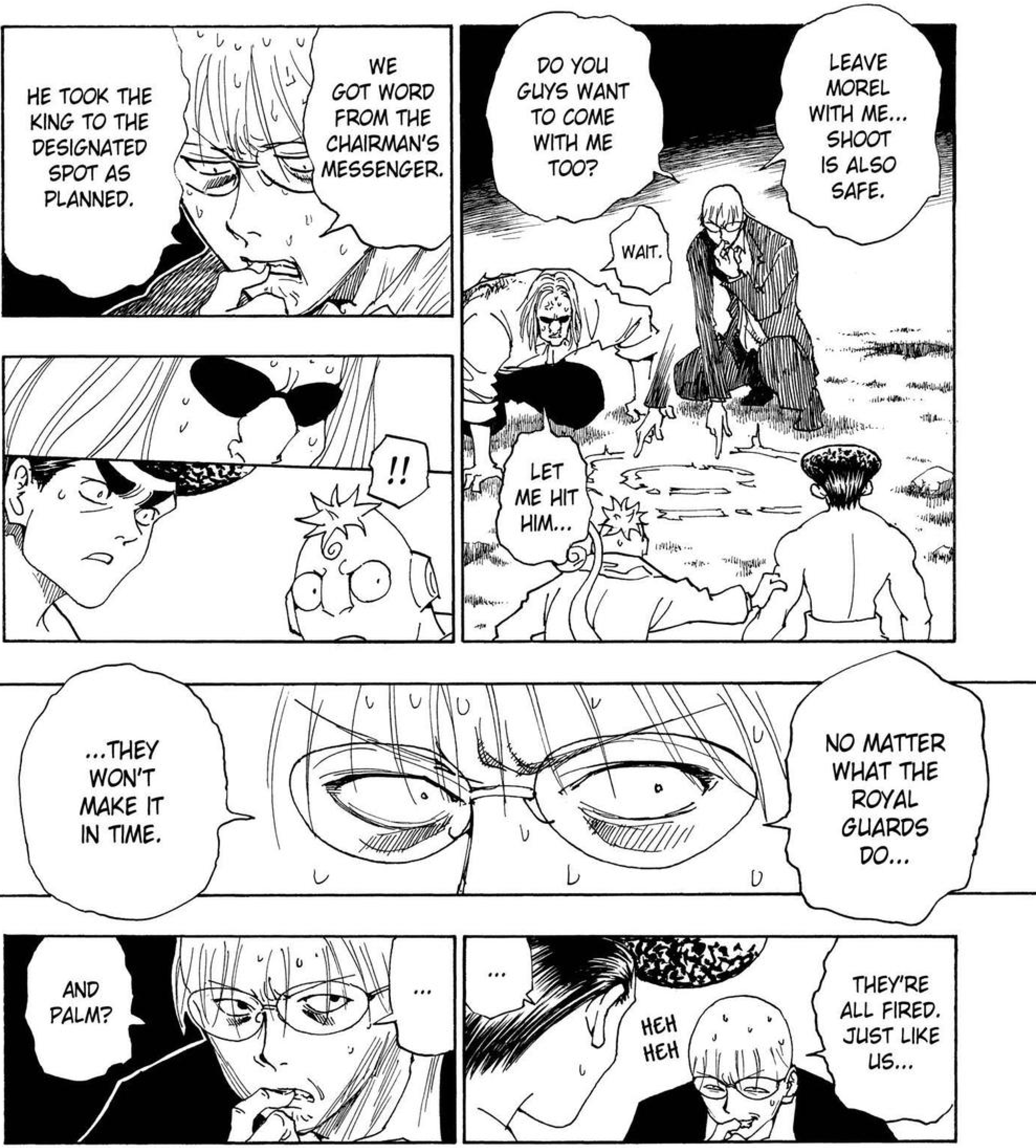
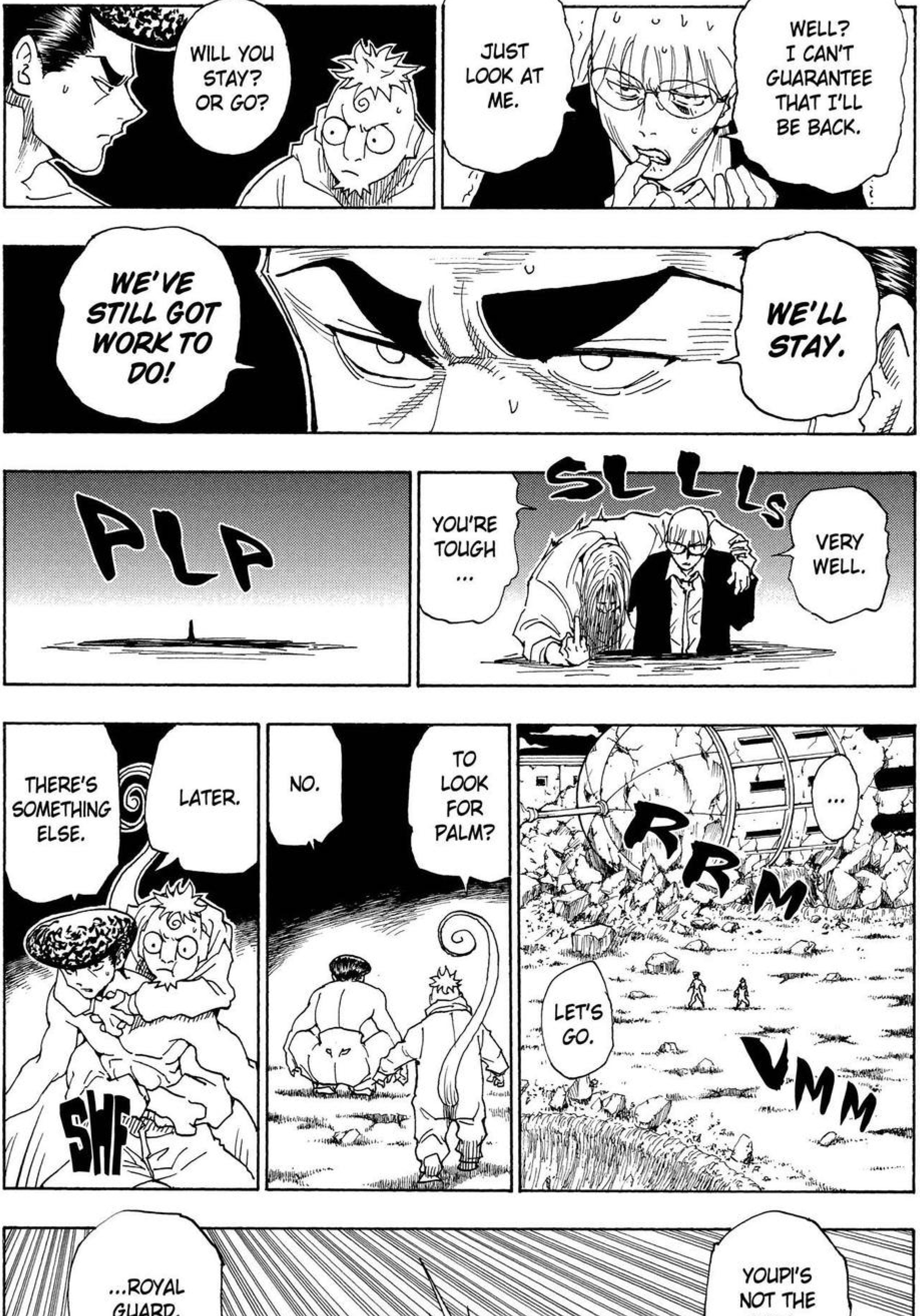
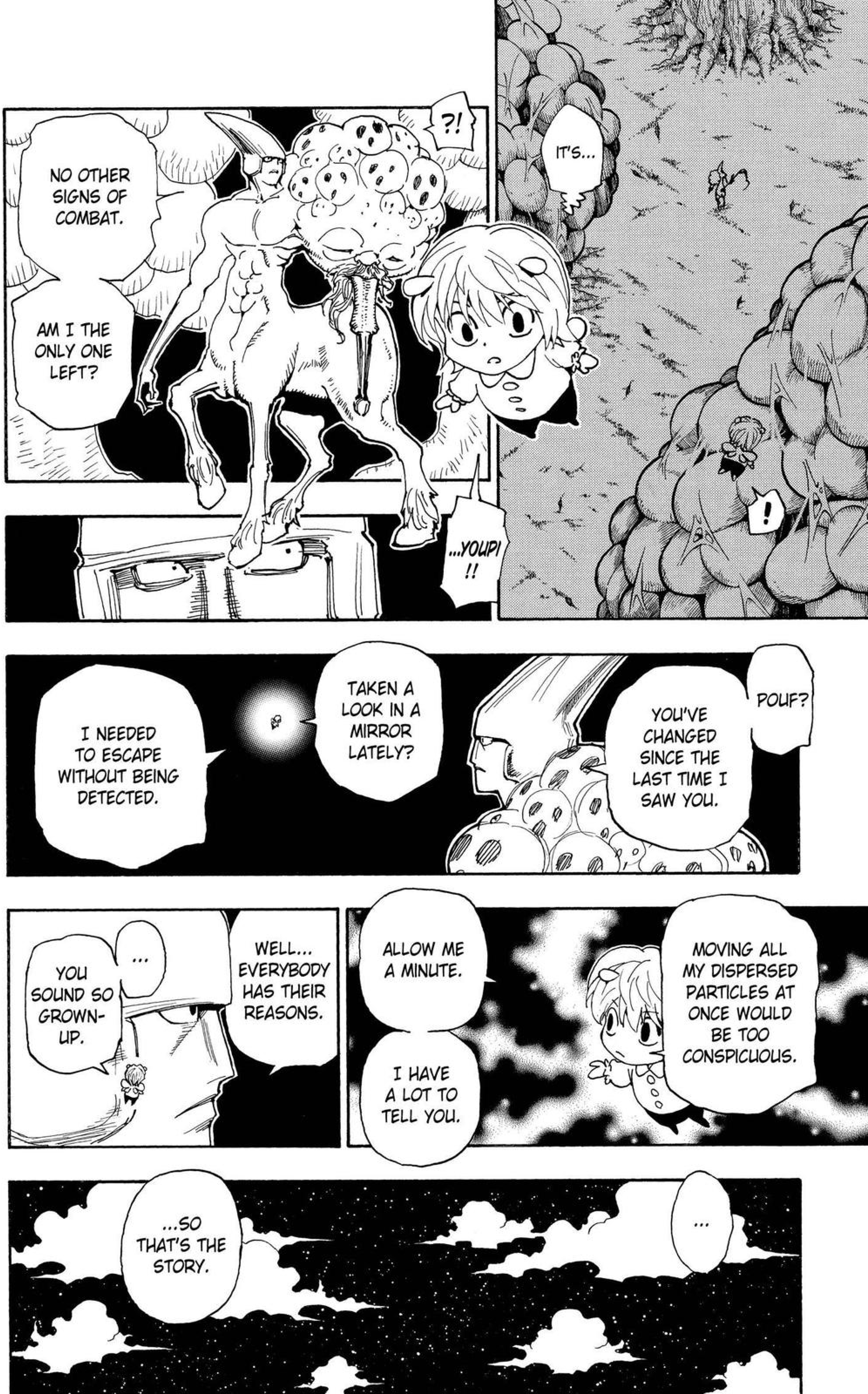

KNUCKLE !!
HE NEEDS HELP!!
BOSS...
?!
I TOLD YOU... TO LEAVE ME...
GO!!

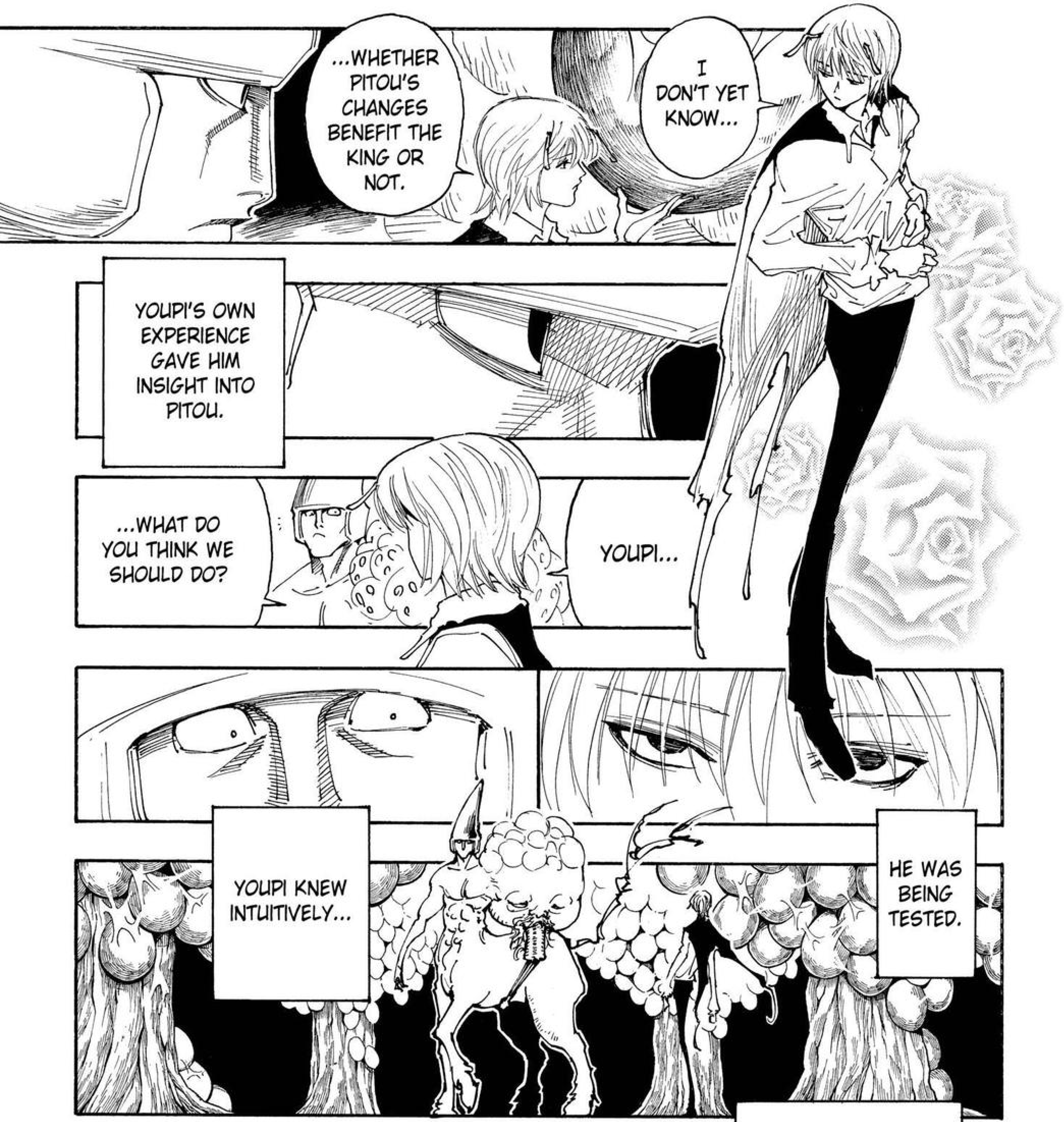

YOU TWO... CAN STILL FIGHT...
DO WHAT... YOU HAVE... TO DO!!
HE SAID... *ANY TIME...*
SO...GO... *NOW!!*
I CAN'T...
I CAN'T SEE HIM...
...AS SOMETHING TO ***EXTERMINATE*** ANY MORE.
HE SAW HOW SERIOUS WE WERE!! HE FELT FOR US!!
HE WASN'T A BAD GUY!!
SO... I DON'T SEE...ANY REASON...
...TO KEEP DOING THIS!!

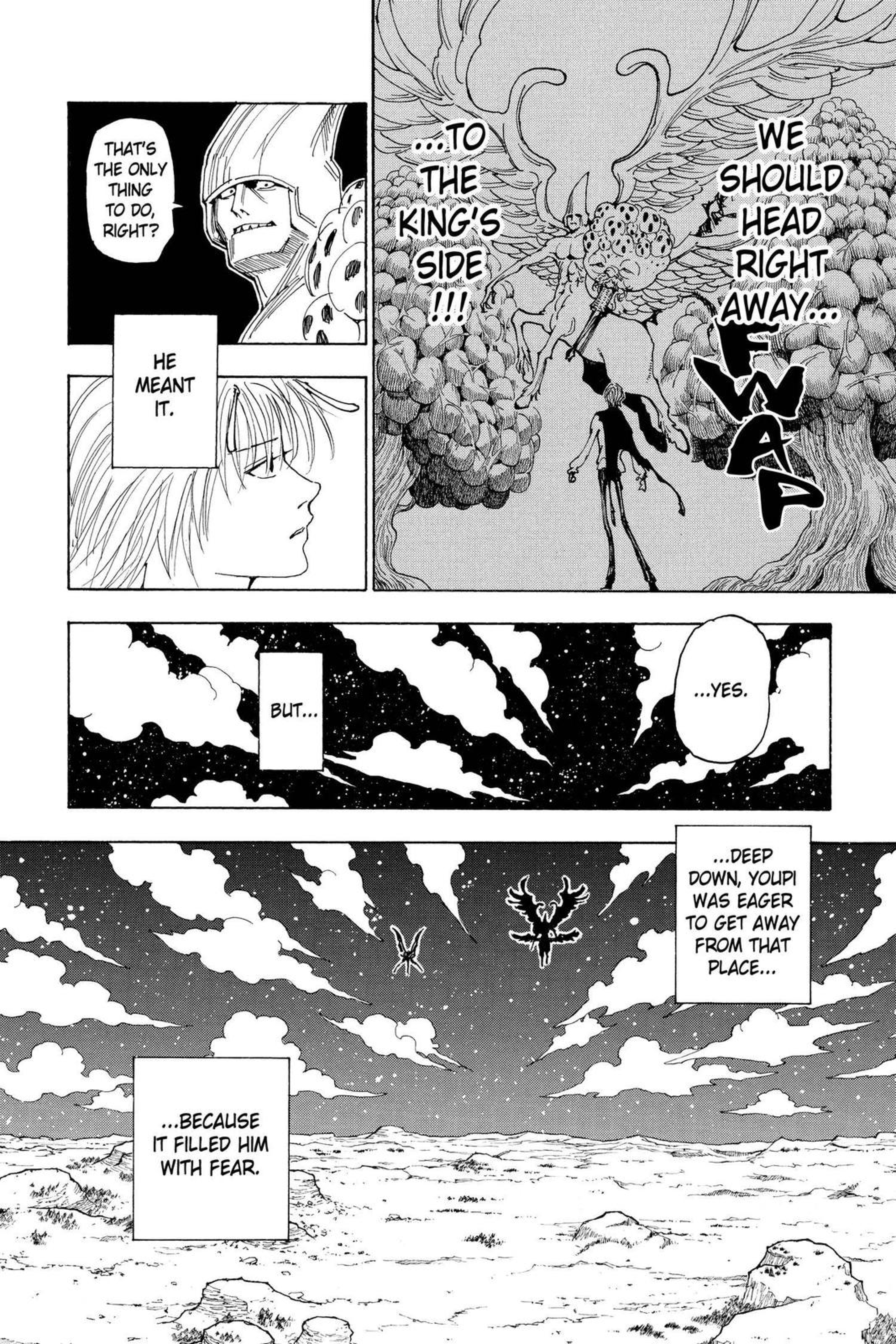

FSSHT
I CAN SEE ONE. *THE KING!*
KNOV!
IT'S NOT ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL SOLDIERS.
THE KING CAN WAVE HIS MAGIC WAND AND TURN THEM ALL INTO MINDLESS SPAWN!

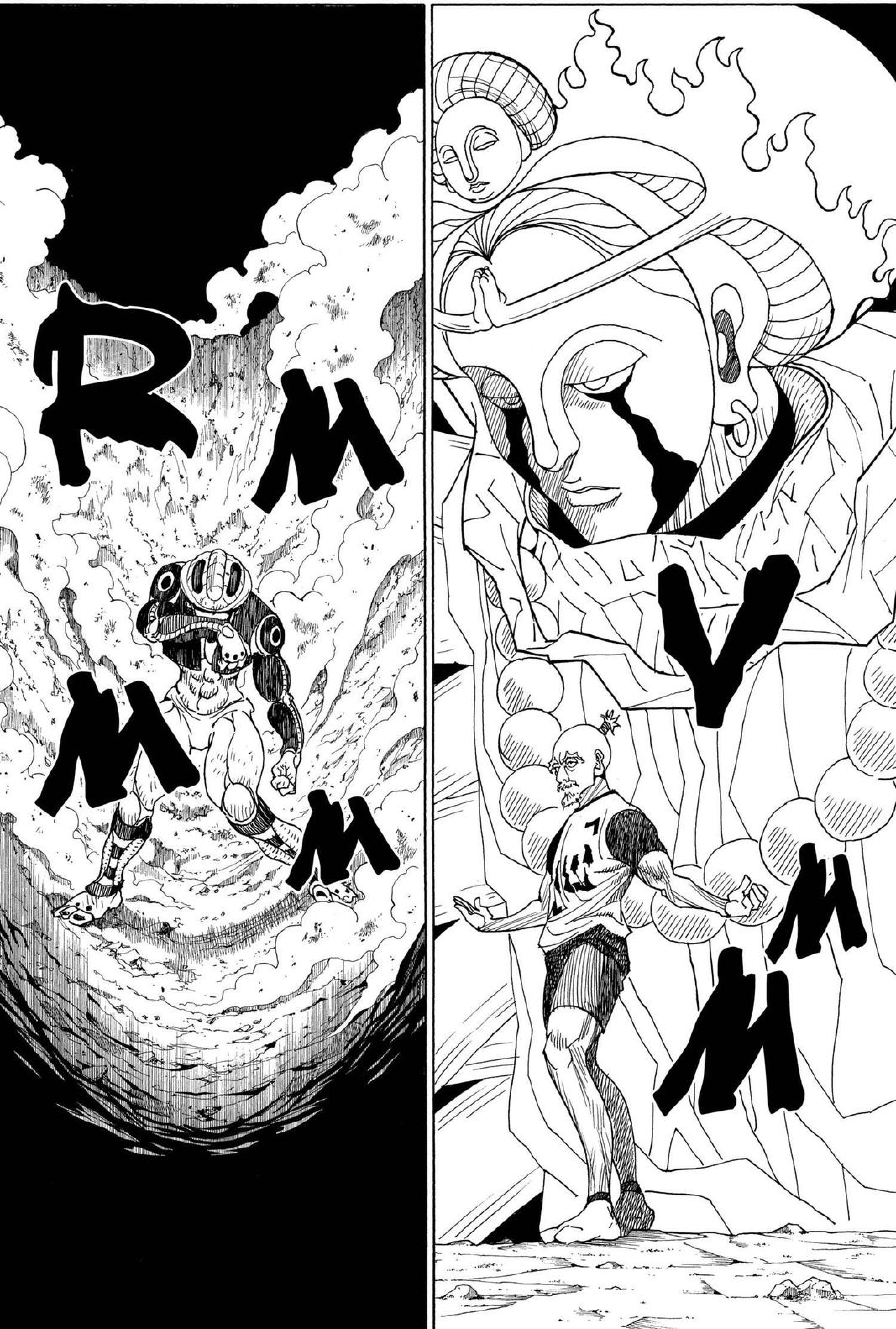

LEAVE MOREL WITH ME... SHOOT IS ALSO SAFE.
DO YOU GUYS WANT TO COME WITH ME TOO?
WAIT.
LET ME HIT HIM...
WE GOT WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN'S MESSENGER.
HE TOOK THE KING TO THE DESIGNATED SPOT AS PLANNED.
!!
NO MATTER WHAT THE ROYAL GUARDS DO...
...THEY WON'T MAKE IT IN TIME.
THEY'RE ALL FIRED. JUST LIKE US...
HEH HEH
...
...
AND PALM?
NO...
NO WORD YET.
I SEE...

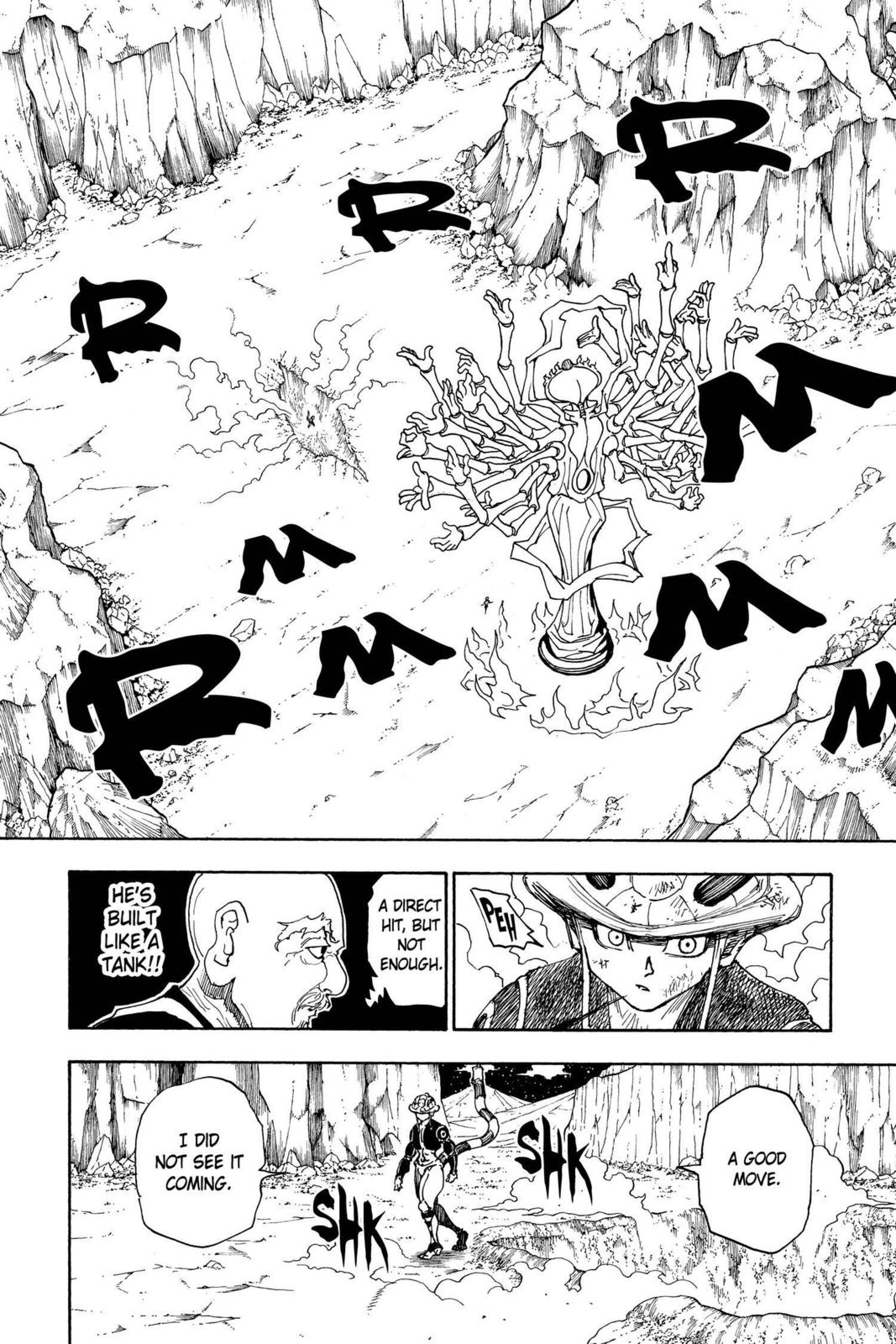

WELL? I CAN'T GUARANTEE THAT I'LL BE BACK.
JUST LOOK AT ME.
WILL YOU STAY? OR GO?
WE'LL STAY.
WE'VE STILL GOT WORK TO DO!
VERY WELL.
SLLLS
YOU'RE TOUGH ...
PLP
...
RRRM
LET'S GO.
VMMM
TO LOOK FOR PALM?
NO.
LATER.
THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE.
SHF
YOUPI'S NOT THE ONLY...
...ROYAL GUARD.

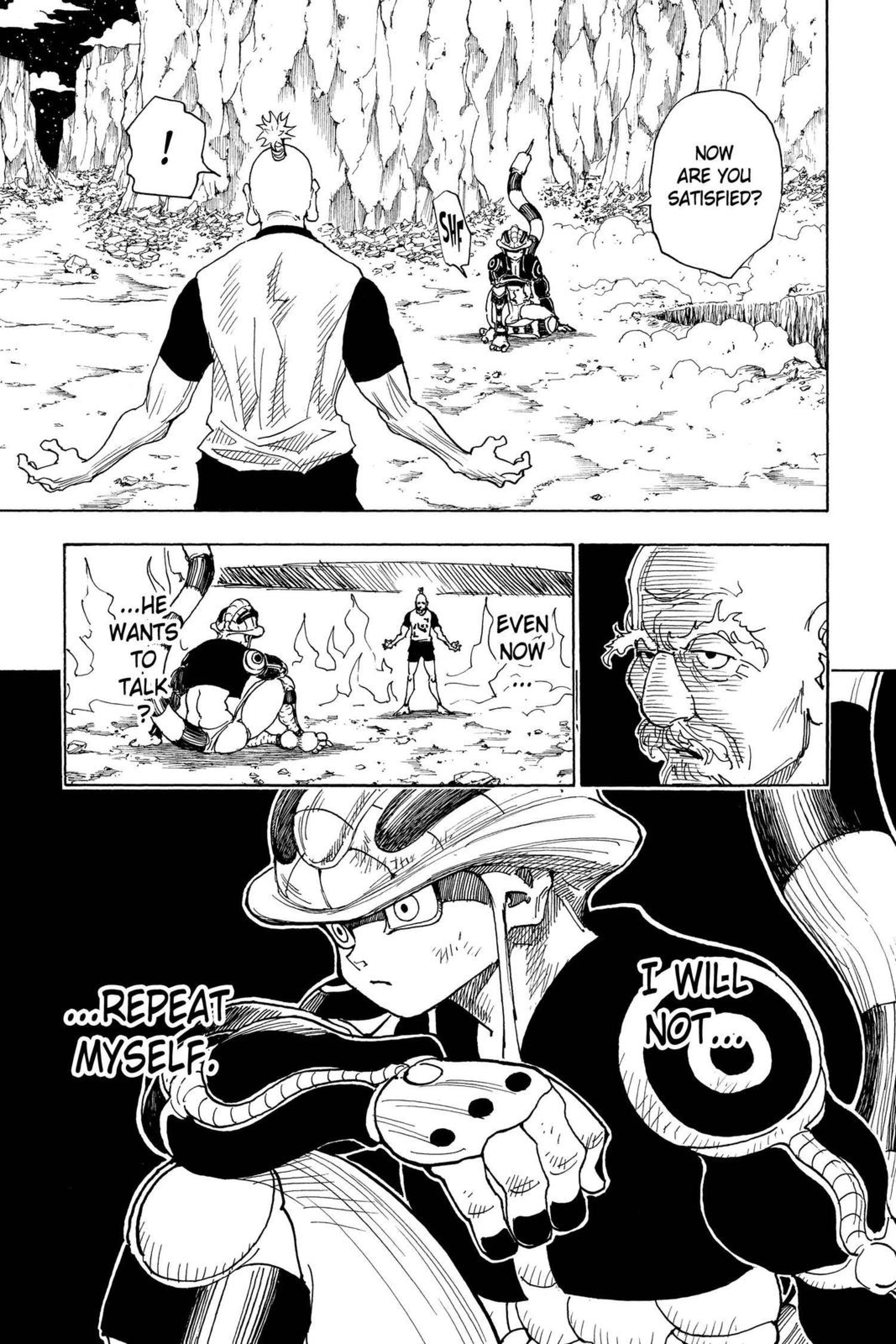

IT'S...
!
?!
NO OTHER SIGNS OF COMBAT.
AM I THE ONLY ONE LEFT?
...YOUPI !!
POUF?
YOU'VE CHANGED SINCE THE LAST TIME I SAW YOU.
TAKEN A LOOK IN A MIRROR LATELY?
I NEEDED TO ESCAPE WITHOUT BEING DETECTED.
MOVING ALL MY DISPERSED PARTICLES AT ONCE WOULD BE TOO CONSPICUOUS.
ALLOW ME A MINUTE.
I HAVE A LOT TO TELL YOU.
WELL... EVERYBODY HAS THEIR REASONS.
...
YOU SOUND SO GROWN-UP.
...
...SO THAT'S THE STORY.

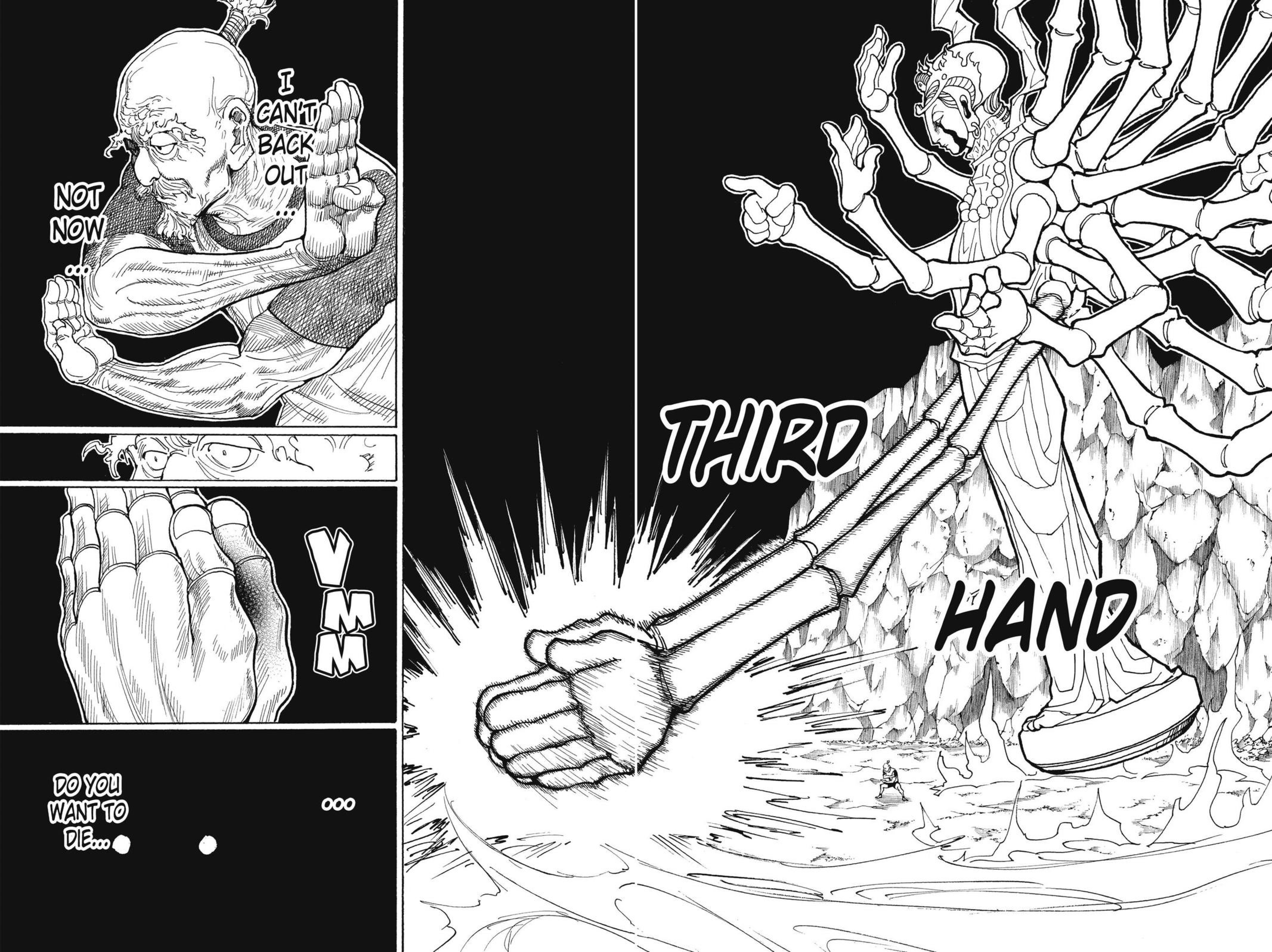

I DON'T YET KNOW...
...WHETHER PITOU'S CHANGES BENEFIT THE KING OR NOT.
YOUPI'S OWN EXPERIENCE GAVE HIM INSIGHT INTO PITOU.
YOUPI...
...WHAT DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD DO?
HE WAS BEING TESTED.
YOUPI KNEW INTUITIVELY...
...THAT POUF FEARED THE CHANGES HAPPENING NOT ONLY TO PITOU...
KRAK
KRAK
STUPID QUESTION.
...BUT TO YOUPI AS WELL.

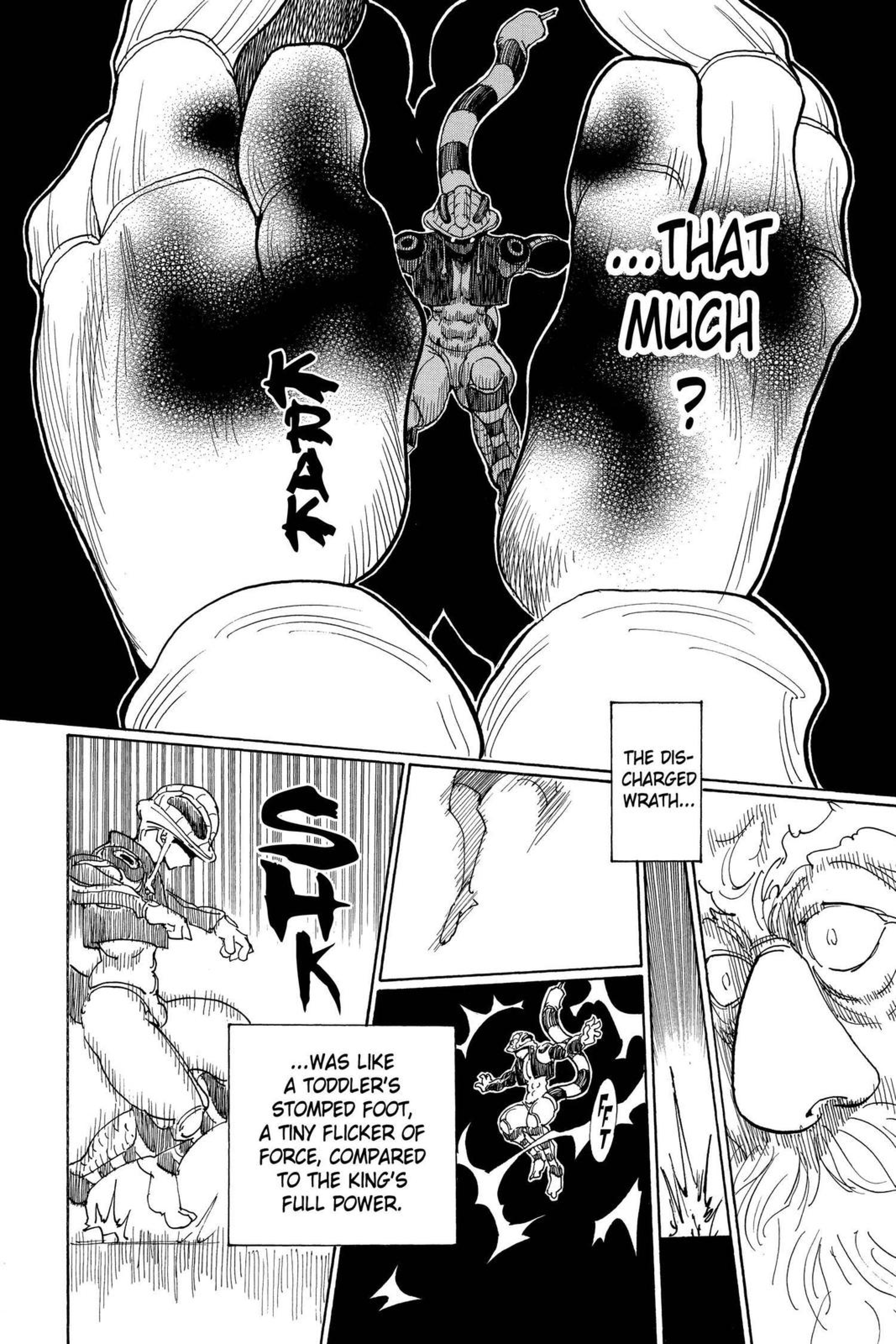

WE SHOULD HEAD RIGHT AWAY...
...TO THE KING'S SIDE!!!
FWAP
THAT'S THE ONLY THING TO DO, RIGHT?
HE MEANT IT.
...YES.
BUT...
...DEEP DOWN, YOUPI WAS EAGER TO GET AWAY FROM THAT PLACE...
...BECAUSE IT FILLED HIM WITH FEAR.

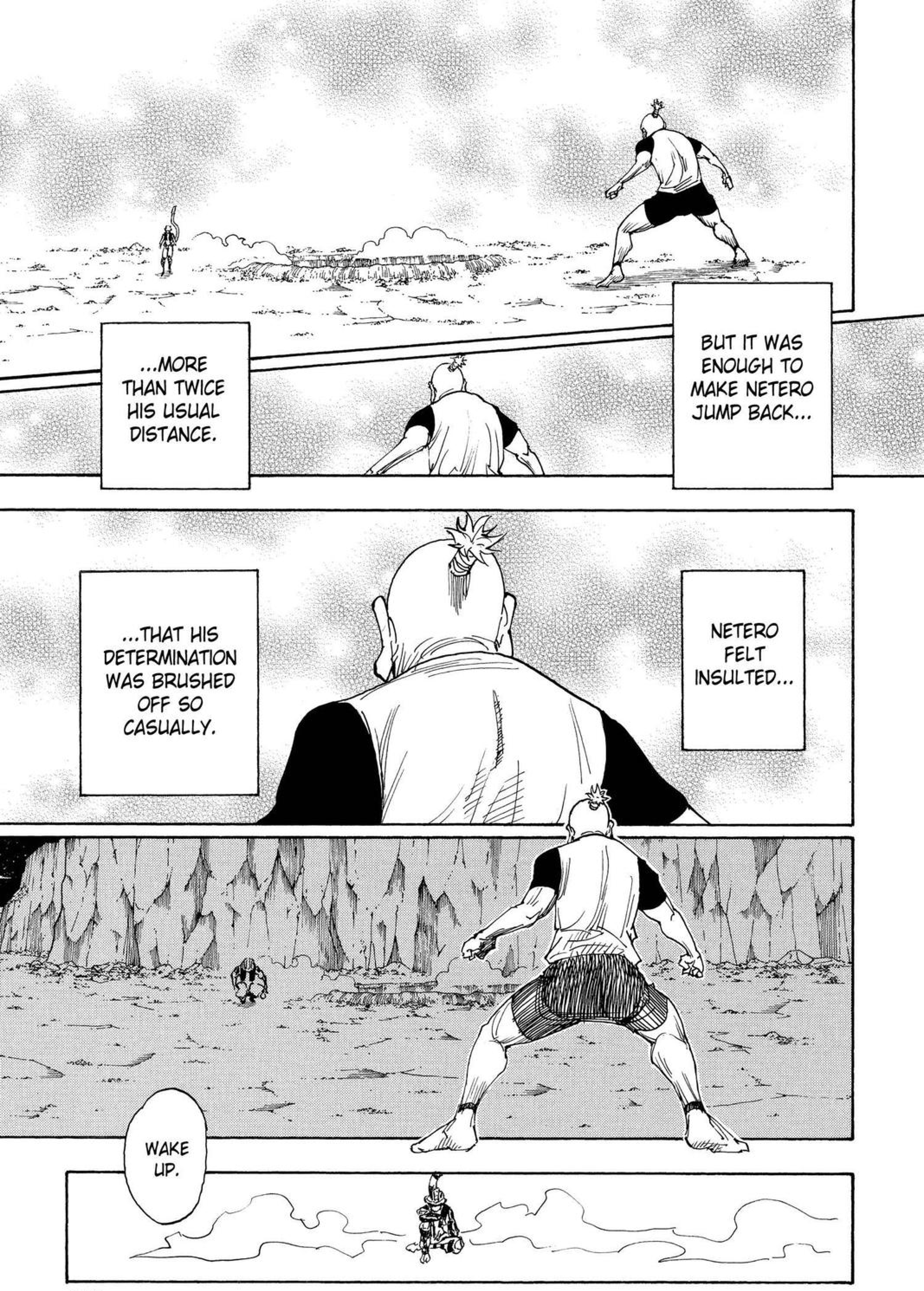

VMM
RMMM

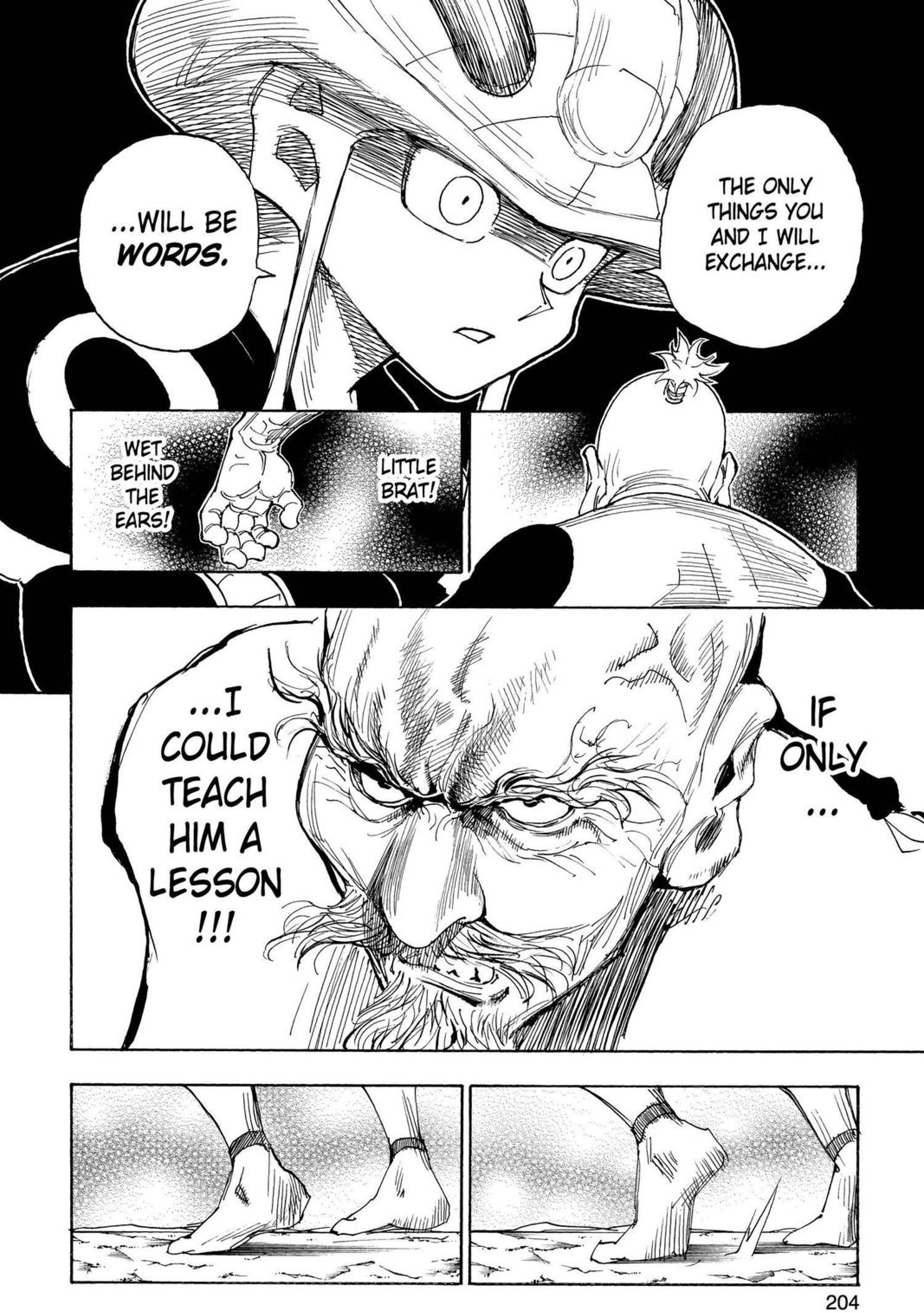

RRRRMMMMM
PEH
A DIRECT HIT, BUT NOT ENOUGH.
HE'S BUILT LIKE A TANK!!
A GOOD MOVE.
SHK
SHK
I DID NOT SEE IT COMING.

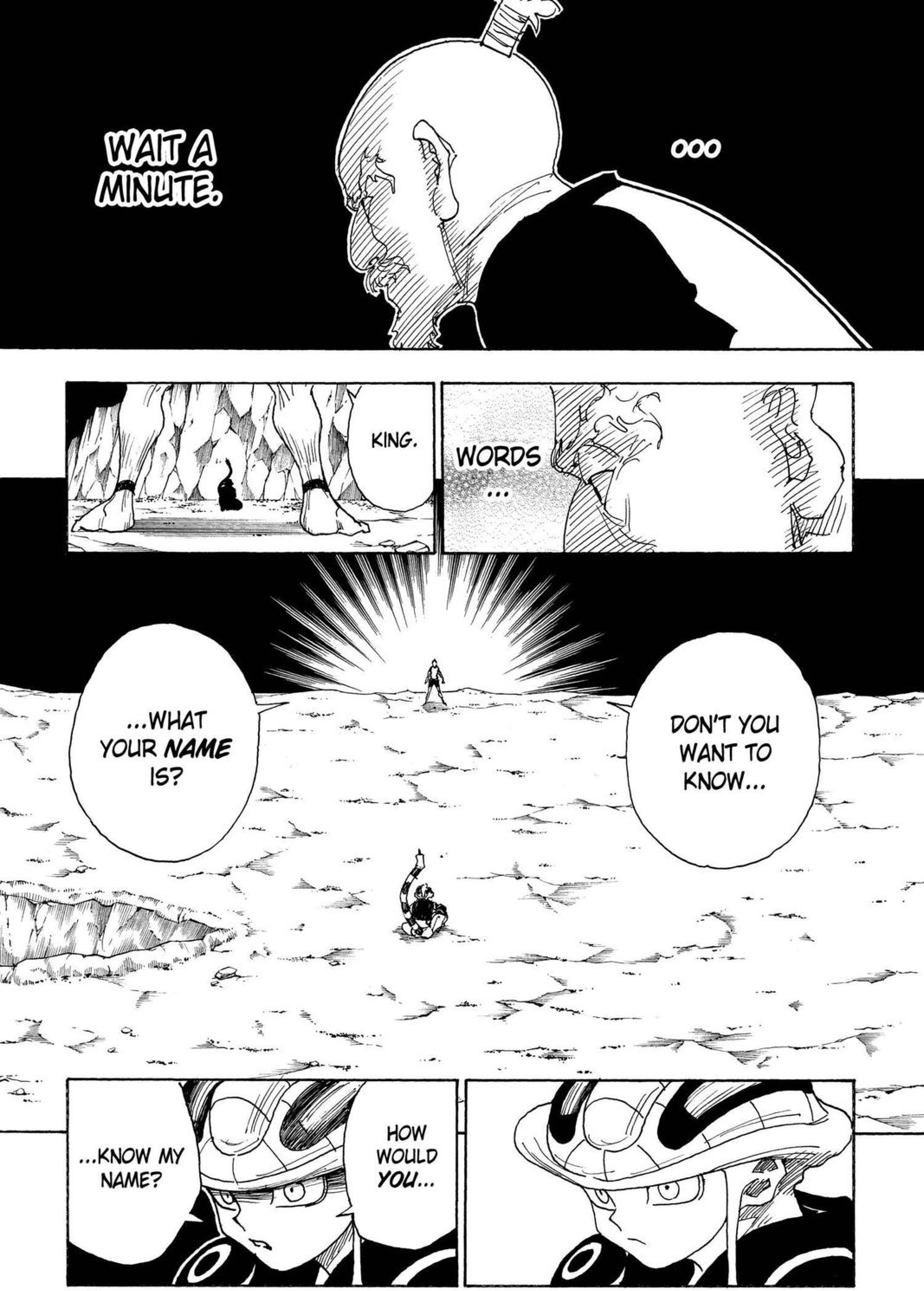

NOW ARE YOU SATISFIED?
SHF
!
EVEN NOW...
...HE WANTS TO TALK?
I WILL NOT...
...REPEAT MYSELF.

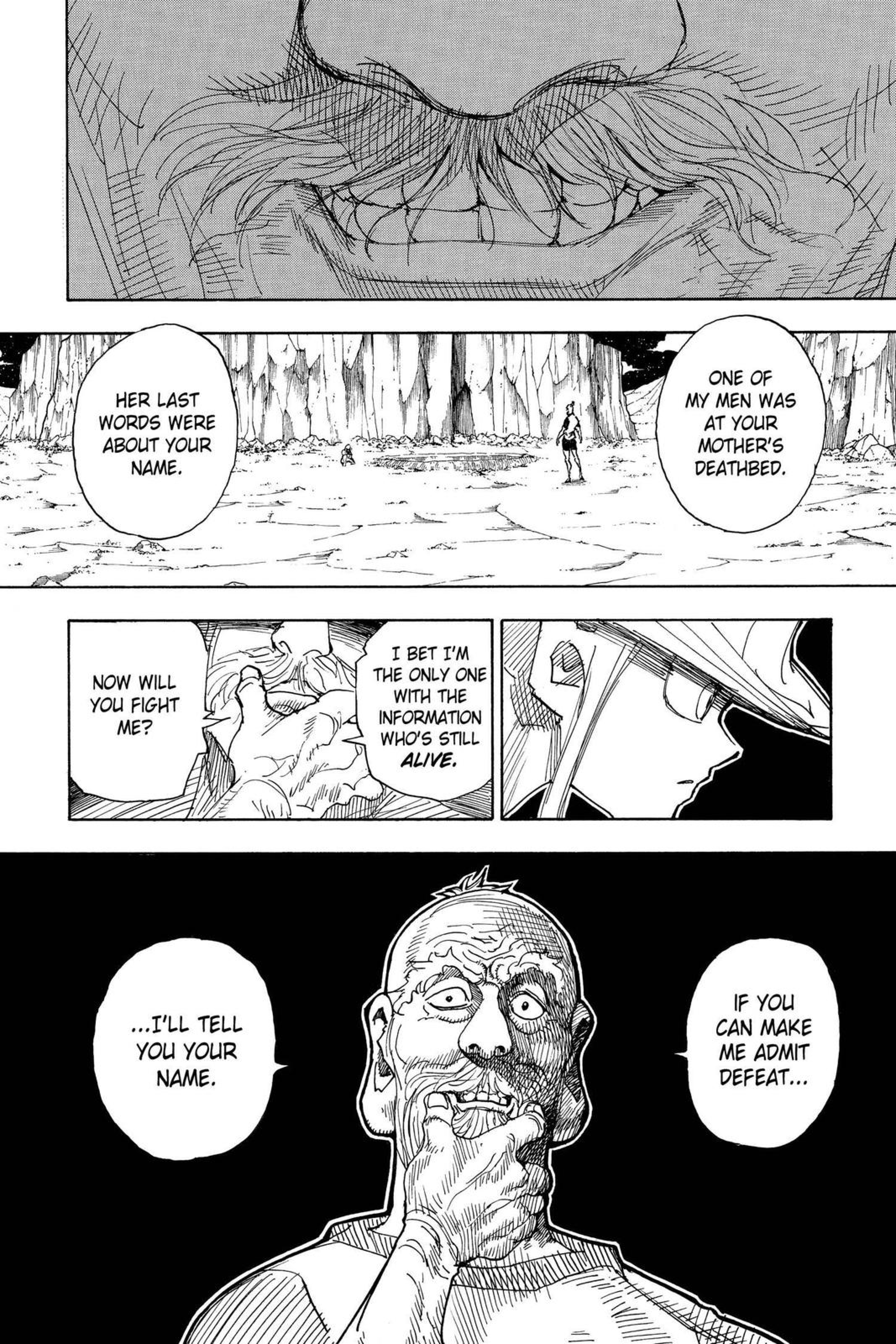

THIRD
HAND
I CAN'T BACK OUT ...
NOT NOW ...
VMM
DO YOU WANT TO DIE...
...
• •

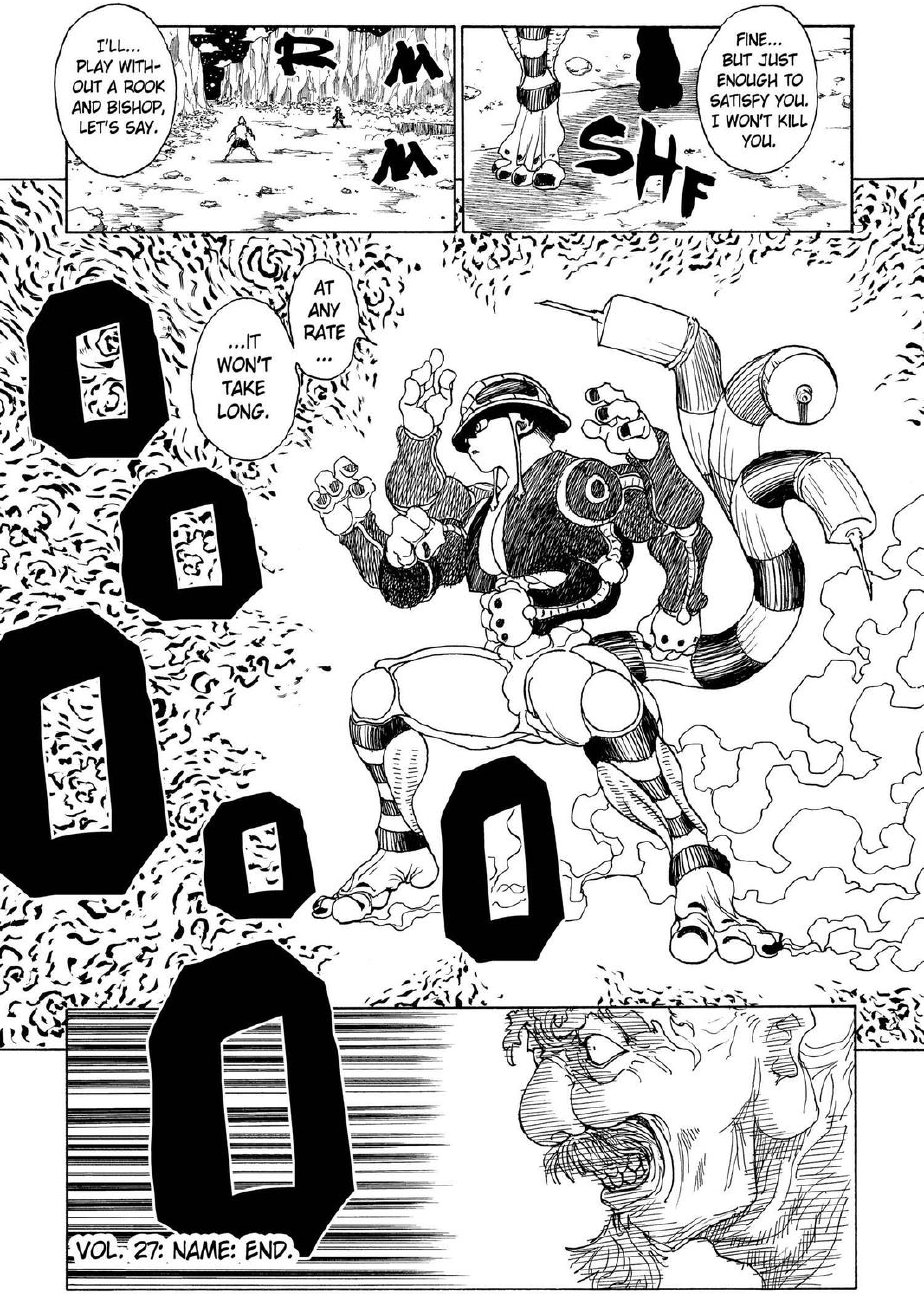

...THAT MUCH?
KRAK
THE DISCHARGED WRATH...
...WAS LIKE A TODDLER'S STOMPED FOOT, A TINY FLICKER OF FORCE, COMPARED TO THE KING'S FULL POWER.
SHK
FFT


BUT IT WAS ENOUGH TO MAKE NETERO JUMP BACK...
...MORE THAN TWICE HIS USUAL DISTANCE.
NETERO FELT INSULTED...
...THAT HIS DETERMINATION WAS BRUSHED OFF SO CASUALLY.
WAKE UP.


THE ONLY THINGS YOU AND I WILL EXCHANGE...
...WILL BE **WORDS.**
LITTLE BRAT!
WET BEHIND THE EARS!
IF ONLY...
...I COULD TEACH HIM A LESSON!!!


ooo
WAIT A MINUTE.
WORDS …
KING.
DON'T YOU WANT TO KNOW…
…WHAT YOUR NAME IS?
HOW WOULD YOU…
…KNOW MY NAME?


ONE OF MY MEN WAS AT YOUR MOTHER'S DEATHBED.
HER LAST WORDS WERE ABOUT YOUR NAME.
I BET I'M THE ONLY ONE WITH THE INFORMATION WHO'S STILL *ALIVE.*
NOW WILL YOU FIGHT ME?
IF YOU CAN MAKE ME ADMIT DEFEAT...
...I'LL TELL YOU YOUR NAME.


I'LL... PLAY WITHOUT A ROOK AND BISHOP, LET'S SAY.
RMM
SHF
FINE... BUT JUST ENOUGH TO SATISFY YOU. I WON'T KILL YOU.
AT ANY RATE...
...IT WON'T TAKE LONG.
OOOOOO
VOL. 27: NAME: END.